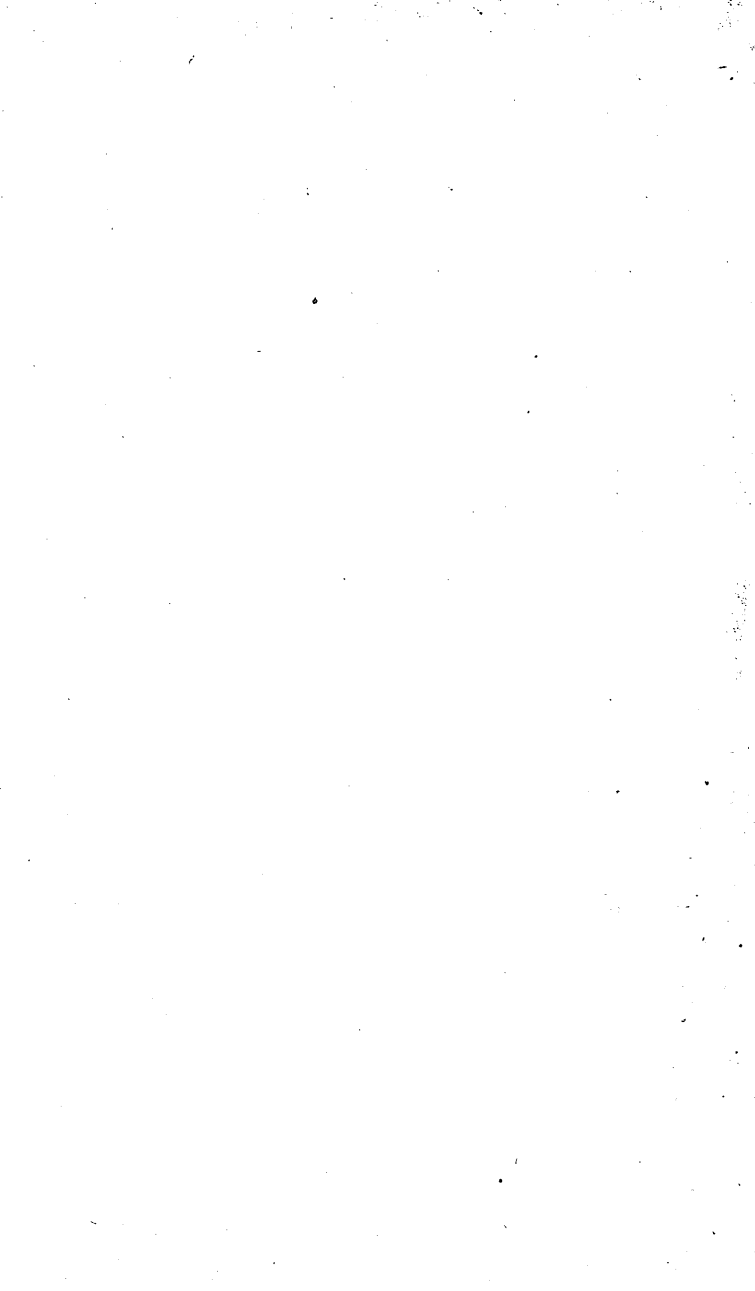


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**WITH CHRIST AS GUIDE**



# WITH CHRIST AS GUIDE

*An Apprehension of Christianity*

BY

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"AS TOMMY SEES US," "THE CHRISTIAN ADVENTURE"

"MEN, WOMEN AND GOD"

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TO  
MY FRIENDS  
IN GREAT GRATITUDE





## INTRODUCTION

WHY should any man write about his religion? Is it not his most sacred and private possession? Why expose it to the public view? Why try to put it into words which can never fully express it, and so run the risk of giving unworthy impressions of it? Why, above all, talk about ideals of which he has come so far short?

These are real enough questions. It is a delicate and responsible thing to talk of the soul's life. But the sufficient answer to them all lies in the fact that religion is too great a thing to keep to oneself. He who has in any measure found a way to fulness of life and to joy, even in the face of the riddles of existence, has found what all men need and what thousands consciously want. If he has any rudiments of love for men and women in him he must try to share his good things. At times he will feel that his knowledge is so truly glorious that it **MUST** be proclaimed.

And in particular, if any man can remove any of the obstacles to religion which stand in the way of others—if he can tell how he got past difficulties—if he can in any degree trace out a path which leads to God, then he needs must attempt to make his contribution. I want, therefore, to set down a statement of what the religion is which has become real and wonderful to me. I do this as my con-

tribution to the common life of a number of people with whom I have spiritual affinity. Many of them I know. Many more I do not know, and these I would like to reach if possible in this way.

Still more am I anxious to set these things down because the religion in the joy of which I live seems to me very simple and to be independent of many theological issues which perplex the mind. I should like, if possible, to help some of those who are perplexed by such theological issues, not by offering them an answer to their questions, but by showing them that the questions need not be raised.

So long as religion was for me involved with difficult and even unanswerable questions I failed to have any sincere and wholehearted joy in it, and therefore it was not for me a life-giving religion. As the years have gone on I have learnt definitely to reject many beliefs which have been associated with Christianity, and consciously to refuse to fatigue my mind with many abstruse and abstract issues. And as a result I have found life. It is the thought of the unnecessary mental troubles of many religiously minded people that has largely induced me to set these things down.

The religion here outlined will seem to many Christian people very different from the religion in which they have been brought up. Some may be hurt at hearing things denied which they believe, and by having other beliefs of theirs declared quite unimportant. I would beg them to believe that I know I am only stating one way of apprehending Christianity. But it is the only way for minds like mine, and if I seem to deny the truth of positions which others hold, I do so not to hurt them, but to help men and women of the same type as myself. To get the religion of Jesus dissociated from unnecessary difficulties would seem to me a matter of supreme importance.

And I do believe that the very essence of the religion of Jesus is in some inadequate way here set down. I have tried to sit at His feet, but at His only, and I have no apologies to offer for refusing to accept what others have added to His message. I can only believe that the religion of Jesus is the one hope of the world by believing also that it has often been given forms in which it was not the hope of the world at all.

It may very possibly be held that one who is neither a scholar nor a theologian is guilty of a certain impertinence in daring to hold and assert any particular view of Christianity. But if the religion of Jesus can only be understood by theologians and scholars it is of no use to the mass of mankind. I may therefore say quite sincerely that it is just because I am neither a theologian nor a scholar that I have become bold enough to make this offering to ordinary people, who want a religion which they can understand and which will actually work in the real world.

Religion as I know it is the gift of Christ. I begin and end with Him. I was never able to begin by believing either in an infallible church or an infallible book. History seems to me to dispose finally of the claim of any church to infallibility, and the Bible, truly studied, itself disposes of the idea that we possess an infallible book.

But I found a point of departure in Christ. When the world at large seemed only to present terrible and distracting problems, and when my own mind was beset by all the confusions and strains which arise in ordinary experience, I found myself arrested and finally convinced by Him. He has claimed me and will not let me go. I have therefore begun by trying to say why and how Christ thus dominates my being and becomes both teacher and master. I know I cannot do this

fully. I continue to find new wonders in Him. I must have a very great deal still to learn. I have been tempted to burn what I have written because it is so miserably inadequate. It is a painful thing to know that one has so failed to do justice to Him. But I let it stand because it is at least an indication of the truth that is in Him.

Many of us were only troubled and hindered by being told that we **MUST** accept the Church's verdict about Him, or **MUST** hold some doctrine about Him. Real conviction did not come to us that way. We had to go to Christ and let Him produce His own effect on us. And we had to take Him as we found Him. We had to study Him to begin with simply as a man. We could assume nothing about Him. We could only let Him take us on from point to point. We found after a while that we were so sure of Him that we could and must believe whatever He taught us and must needs at least try to do whatever He commanded.

This little book therefore has fallen naturally into three parts. The first is an account of the personality of Jesus. The second is an attempt to realize what are the religious convictions and experiences to which Jesus leads. And the third is a more negative section in which I try to dissociate the religion of Jesus from some of the hampering and perplexing accretions which have been formed around it, and which have to-day the effect of preventing many from rejoicing in what Jesus can give them.

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# WITH CHRIST AS GUIDE

## PART I

### THE PERSONALITY OF JESUS

#### 1. *His Interest in Human Life.*

WHEN I began to see the real Jesus what first attracted me was His intimate acquaintance with ordinary life, and the utter absence of any lofty abstraction from our common concerns and our familiar hopes and fears. Another attitude has characterized much Oriental piety. Saints of the East have often declared that the things of sense are all illusion and that the way to holiness lies in withdrawal from life, and a career of contemplation. But that repels me. I am intensely interested in life. I admire man's ceaseless struggle after a finer civilization. I want to be in that surge of effort. I want to believe that success in the great human enterprise is a possibility. And I find that Jesus was constantly concerned with that matter also. I do not find in Him the attitude of withdrawal. I find Him accepting ordinary life as the stage on which a great enterprise had to be carried through. And at once my essential instincts declare, "Here, so far, is the leader for me."

A score of things betray this interest in life. How He must have watched His mother at her household work! He knew all about bread-making and house-cleaning, and the mending of



clothes. He must have watched the farmers also, for He knew about sowing and reaping, and the way in which plants grow. He knew about the work of vinedressers and could find illustrations for His teaching in it. He must have listened to travelling merchants, for He knew about buying and selling and the making of bargains.

He was no recluse, coming out of His isolation now and then to preach to men from some external point of view, but rather a man involved with His brethren all the time in the comings and goings of common life. He adds dignity to the ordinary human career by His interest in it.

And all this finds expression in the central doctrine of His teaching. What He meant by the Kingdom of God was a new way of life both for individuals and society, which would involve at last success in the age-long endeavour of the race to attain a life in which we can find a worthy satisfaction. He was concerned about social confusion, and political oppression, and all the failures of common life. He does not say, "Let us turn away from all that as a mere secular interest." Rather He says, "Let us put it all right. Let us build a new Kingdom—a Kingdom of God. . . . Let us learn how to do common things to the glory of God." He came to release life, not to cramp it—to touch the common things of every day and make them great. And so work, and love, and marriage, and family life, and all the effort, endurance, and patience which they involve are glorified by Jesus. The cynic pictures all such things as petty. Jesus, with a far more penetrating vision, saw how they may be made beautiful and therefore great. It was His mission to make men and women "whole" in the sense of complete. He desired to see men and women attaining to a full harmonized activity of all their powers. In the

holy life as He pictures it there is a place for the activity of the body with all its varied functions; for the human mind with its powers of thought and remembrance and imagination; for our creative instincts which use ALL the arts; for a full emotional life, a many-sided corporate life, and above all a generous activity of the heart.

In this respect the life to which Jesus called men was the very negation of asceticism. His ideal for us was positive self-expression, and not mere repression; joy, not gloom; freedom, not bonds. Only because He did so perfectly know real men and women he also utters a warning. The full life which is our ideal is not possible, He implies, for us all. Perhaps it is not yet quite possible for anybody. There are parts of us which are unmanageable. There are unruly members in the private republic of each of us. And in order that we may live and not die Jesus recommends very drastic steps with such unruly faculties. "If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out." Not because seeing is not a good thing, but because it is better to live a life that is less than complete if the alternative is to be overthrown by the lawless element in us.

And yet, that remembered, it is still true that the ideal to which Jesus calls us is the full life, just to that degree of which we are capable.

2. I am, secondly, impressed by the *amount of personal force* that was incarnated in Jesus. I am sure He must have been a man of fine physical proportions. We never hear of His being ill. Hard work and simple living had made Him hardy, and He must have had all the grace and power which come from health and vigour. Conventional art has greatly wronged Him, picturing Him as possessed of a weakly body, and attributing to

Him an effeminate deportment. He must have had a body which was a perfect instrument for His will. If God was incarnate in Him, the body must have been in every sense a splendid body which expressed divine purposes. Of course, a true picture of His face would show the signs of many inward conflicts and hard-won victories. His must have been a finely sensitive and mobile face, but it was not delicate in the sense of lacking health. If we could but get our imaginations right on this point we should be done for ever with the mischievous notion that there is something rather spiritual and holy about being pale, or a little anæmic, or even fragile, for the idea is merely nonsense. It was a religion for robust men and women that Jesus brought us, and He embodied it.

But there was a finer kind of strength about Jesus. I find it expressed in His constant serenity. We never see Him worried or distracted.

He lived an immensely full life. Great cares and great dangers were His constant companions, but He never got flurried. He never seems even to have been in a hurry. I cannot see Him running to keep an appointment, or speaking loudly through inward turmoil. His life was too well ordered for that. There was plenty of emotion in His life. He was anything but cold; He rejoiced; He wept; He smiled; He loved intensely. He was not afraid of emotions, but He was master of Himself through them all; He accepted the natural emotions of life in a frank and genuine way, and did not let them be His masters. Jesus knew the secret of avoiding nervous breakdown, though He lived with such unparalleled intensity.

Therefore He had what I would call "Sureness of Touch." He seems to have been always ready for each situation as it arose, and to have known exactly what to do and what to say. If He went

through periods of indecision, which is very likely, He dealt with them when He was alone with God, and men never saw Him undecided or even puzzled. He never had to retract or explain anything, as other great men have often to do. He seems never to have been either intellectually or ethically perplexed. It may have taken Him many nights of lonely communion with God before He could see His way, but as He appeared among men He always had this splendid sureness of touch; always He walked with a firm tread through life's complexities.

What a comfort it must have been to follow Him! It was for this reason that people recognized in Him "one who taught as having authority." It is this that gives Him authority to this day.

Realizing these things, I am not surprised to find that His personality proved almost irresistible. There are three very interesting instances of this. In the fourth chapter of Luke we are told of a multitude that sought to throw Him down from a precipice. "But He, passing through the midst of them, went His way." Just that! He turned and walked through them, and nobody dared to put forth a hand. Again in John's Gospel we are told of a point at which they sought to take Him. "But no man laid his hands upon Him, because His hour was not yet come." He was not yet willing to be taken, and against His will they could not do it. And lastly, there is that very interesting story of the policemen who were sent to arrest Him, and who came back empty-handed saying simply, "Never man spake like this man." They evidently felt it would have been simply sacrilege to lay rough hands upon Him.

Here is something which it is hard to explain. We call it power of personality. There are people whom others cannot slight, cannot neglect, cannot

forget. They subdue all ordinary mortals. By instinct we all accord them deference. This power is not given by birth or status, or wealth. It is a fruit of character, and Jesus had it in a supreme degree.

All through His life single individuals hesitated to attack Jesus. Not till a great many had taken council together with the rulers did they make bold to seize Him. Then there came a day when the weak, fickle mob was let loose, and they howled and spit upon Him and mocked Him. Yes! WHEN His hour had come. Till then He held them all at bay. He had that kind of majesty.

And if we could realize that being that kind of man He was ALSO so human and approachable that ordinary simple people felt at home with Him, we should probably get the truest possible impression of Him. In Him iron strength and infinite tenderness were met together.

If we raise the very interesting question of how such authority as Christ's is acquired, I think we come at least very near to the answer if we say that it was the result of His selflessness. Nothing weakens men like self-seeking. Others are sure to detect it, and then influence goes. A man must be living for ends altogether outside himself to win such authority. Such a man dares to claim allegiance and to stand fast to the positions he has taken up just because he is not working for self. Otherwise he cannot dare. As others come to recognize this selflessness they bow before it because it is the most august quality that anybody can have. Men win authority in proportion as self goes into the background. So Jesus was of all men the strongest. He could suffer more perfectly, endure more bravely, and love more deeply than any other.

### 3. *His Independence.*

This is perhaps only another aspect of His strength, but it is worth looking at separately. It is wonderful how entirely without the ordinary supports of life Jesus was. He had a terribly difficult and dangerous rôle to fill, and He had no outward resources. He had no social position, no money, and no office. No existing set of people was with Him. He was a lonely individual. And against Him there were the church of His day, the rulers of the synagogues, the Scribes, the Pharisees, and the Priests. Ere long the civil authorities were also against Him, and always the rich hated Him.

At first He had the multitude with Him, but after a while they deserted Him, having utterly failed to understand. Even His family were of no use to Him. There came a day when they thought Him beside Himself. And then there were left only the twelve, of whom one betrayed Him, while all the others forsook Him and fled.

As life has gone on this has impressed me more and more. There is a tendency in all of us to lean on others. Having conceived any project, we look round for others who will help us with it. We tend to wish to be with the crowd, and dislike being held peculiar. We want popularity so much that we are tempted to compromise with conscience. We are not quite sure of ourselves, and so crave to be assured that clever men or men of position agree with us.

Perhaps the ultimate test of courage arrives only when we find that to be true we shall have to go on though all disagree and many despise. We can do without the approval of stupid people, or the approval of bad people, but to see one's friends turn their backs, to turn to one's family in vain,

to have NO understanding love on which to lean—that is the hardest and most cruel of ordeals. And Jesus walked towards that loneliness all through His life, so that at the end no man stood by Him. No man who had not utterly conquered fear could do that. Only the VERY strong can walk on that path.

And yet do not let us imagine that Jesus was indifferent to human affection. He was essentially an affectionate man. Trace out the story of His relations with His mother and it will prove to be a very beautiful story. He must have been very near to her through the long years of her widowhood, and at the very end His last thought concerned her, so that He committed her to the care of His closest friend. When the impetuous Peter once tried to dissuade Him from the way of the cross He turned upon him with the cutting words, "Get thee behind me, Satan"; and the very force of those words is the proof that Jesus was susceptible to the influence of human love, which often tries to hold dear ones back from the dangers of the way of truth.

And it was that affectionate, warm-hearted man who was compelled by His destiny to drink the cup of desertion to the dregs.

4. A word would seem to be required at this point about *His meekness*. The fact that Christ was meek has led to the production of a phrase such as "gentle Jesus, meek and mild," and to large numbers of pictures in which we are shown a graceful, rather effeminate figure, beautifully harmless and rather ineffective-looking. And perhaps nothing has more distorted the truth. Meek Jesus certainly was in the sense that He was entirely devoid of any tendency towards self-assertion. But He was anything but "mild."

At times He was nothing less than terrible. He could be exacting with His disciples to a point that seems almost cruel: "He that taketh not his cross cannot be my disciple." He could silence and abash hypocrites with a storm of whirling words that almost terrifies to this day, and He could speak with a truly scathing intentness and incisiveness about those who abused children or oppressed the weak. In the name of God and for the cause of God He could be utterly unbending and unyielding. Because there is always iron in true love He could be almost remorselessly strong. He could break pretence and deceit with blows like those of a sledge hammer.

To save Himself He would not lift a finger. Therein lay His meekness. But for the cause of God, and the children of God whom He loved, He could be like a warrior. There is that much truth in the quaint mediæval fashion which called Him "The perfect knight."

### 5. *His Appreciativeness.*

I believe we should get far on towards an understanding of Jesus if we could discover what it was in Him which attracted ordinary men and women so much. We hear very early in the story of a noisy, hearty crowd of Matthew's friends with whom Jesus took dinner, and who seemed to be very glad to have Him with them. Superior persons called them "publicans and sinners" and were shocked. But Christ did not mind that. His business lay with such people. That is easily understood. What is much more interesting is the question of why they liked Him so much. People of that sort very often turn away from religious teachers. To-day they are generally outside the churches. They resent being preached at, and they



forget. They subdue all ordinary mortals. By instinct we all accord them deference. This power is not given by birth or status, or wealth. It is a fruit of character, and Jesus had it in a supreme degree.

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are not at home in meetings. They are hard to approach. But they loved Jesus, at least at first. They crowded round Him, and made a friend of Him.

What was the secret? It cannot be that out of any sense of duty He put up with them, or forced Himself to meet them. It cannot have been merely that out of zeal for righteousness He wished to deal with them. These motives are easily detected, and they repel instead of attracting. No! I am sure the secret lay in the fact that Jesus Himself was attracted. He really liked those people, and they would have a sense of that; and if at first it simply astonished them, they would respond to it by a genuine liking for Him in return.

The one attitude which, so far as I can see, Jesus NEVER adopted to anyone was the attitude of contempt. He was angry with some people. He had a terribly clear vision of the sins of some people. He could deal in terrible words at times. He also had pity and sorrow for people. But contempt NEVER. To despise a human being seemed to Him, I believe, almost the ultimate profanity. A human being was always for Him a piece of the work of God, and He met all men and women and children with a genuine respect. There may have been many lost sheep among them, but still they were God's sheep.

We may well ask how He achieved this attitude. The unattractive qualities of many men and women must have been painfully obvious. Some of them must have had on their faces the coarse marks put there by gross sin. Many of them were hard, or mean, or timid, or deceitful. Many of them must have been vulgar, and Jesus had a delicately refined spirit. How could He really like them? I have often heard refined people in our day say, "You simply can't like such people." But Jesus

could. I believe the secret lay in this, that Jesus never saw only the unattractive things about a man or woman. He always saw all the rest.

And there always is so much else. Many wayward sinners have a wealth of generous affection in them. Many rough-mannered people have a fine sincerity. People with hot tempers often have great gifts of efficiency. People weak in one respect are often strong in another. I believe that many people who have been guilty of crimes really have also a great deal of idealism in them.

And so Jesus found something real in each soul to appreciate and love. In that way He could be hopeful about everybody. He made people believe in themselves just because He believed in them. They rose to meet His expectation and became better people in the very act. Abuse and blame are after all coarse tools. Jesus never used them. He used instead faith and trust, and drew out strange and often unsuspected stores of goodness from unlikely quarters.

6. Then plainly there was in Jesus a very wonderful sensitiveness to people's needs, and a piercing insight into their actual condition. The Gospels are full of instances of this. Walking with a crowd one day through the streets of Jericho, He suddenly stopped to speak to a man in a tree. He might so easily never have seen him, but He seemed to be aware that there was spiritual need somewhere close to Him; and so He stopped and spoke to that strange little man out of the fulness of His knowledge of his state.

Once again when He was in the centre of a thronging crowd a shy woman put out her hand to touch His garment. He cannot have felt that touch in the ordinary way, but His spirit was aware of the presence of somebody in a state of

need and hope, and so He stopped and found her, and talked to her till she had found life. Another day a man approached Him whom He had never seen before, but He was able to pronounce him at once "an Israelite in whom there is no guile." His spirit was aware of the clean and pure spirit that looked out of that man's eyes. Or, once more, He sat one day by a well, and a complete stranger drew near. But Jesus knew the essential truths about her, and so talked with her that she described Him as a man that told her all things she had done. Consider the case of the rich young ruler. He was a man with a fine clean life behind him, lovable, probably good-looking, and in moral earnest about his own state. Yet Jesus saw past all that to a man in deadly danger through the subtle sin of covetousness. Indeed, "He knew what was in man." Men could not pretend with Him. Very few ever tried. Because of what He was in Himself He saw the real truth about all the people He met.

And the other side of that is that He understood as nobody else has ever understood. There was, and is, extraordinary comfort for many in the fact. Our most acute needs often centre in feelings which we cannot describe. Things are wrong with us, but we cannot tell anybody what is wrong. We are perplexed by ourselves. But Jesus did not need to be told; He understood. And therefore He could give a quality of sympathy of which no one else has ever been master.

He gave men and women the wonderful comfort and peace which come from being really at last utterly understood by a sympathetic soul. That is what made Him such a perfect helper. He had no cut-and-dried methods with people. He did not classify and ticket them. The modern psychologists with their terminology and their types of cases seem very clumsy people compared with

Him. He treated each case by itself, and with the firm touch that came from perfect insight.

And if we like to ask ourselves where lay the secret of that amazing power of His, I fancy the answer again lies partly in His selflessness, which made Him able to give Himself without reserve to other people, and beyond that in those hours of lonely communion with God through which His whole being was refined and sensitized till he responded to all the actual human facts about Him.

7. I have already by implication said something about His way with sinners, but I want to dwell on that point a little further. He seems to me to have had two different ways with sinners. For one class of sinners—namely religious hypocrites—He had a way which at times was nothing less than utterly terrible. The scathing words which He addressed to them seem to this day to scorch and blister. “Woe unto you, for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but are within full of dead men’s bones and of all uncleanness.” Surely these are among the most terrible things ever said. I have wondered a great deal about the mystery of His attitude here. It is so utterly different to His attitude to all other sinners. Did He feel that the one hope for these men lay in their being unmasked to themselves, and did He use His whirling words in the hope that by such blows they might at last be awakened to the truth? That He loved even them, and wanted to save them, I dare not, cannot, doubt. Apparently it was a case in which love itself had to use iron and terrible tools.

But for all others, without exception, it seems to me He used only the ways of kindness, expectation, and faith. He met the most degraded sinners



with hopefulness. He said very little to them about their sins. He knew that most people below the surface were very miserable about them. Though men's sins must have tortured Him, He did not parade that torture but gave of His love with unsparing hands. It was, in fact, the Gospel that He was putting into action—the Gospel which works on the assumption that after the law has failed, and after reproaches have failed, there is something that love can do which after all may save. That love Jesus gave without stint to all and always; and it did save where everything else had failed. The people have become a very great multitude who, having been utterly lost and utterly hopeless about themselves, have attained after all to newness of life and to real liberty because “the love of Christ constrained them.”

8. I love to picture Jesus with the children about Him. Unconsciously children constitute an extraordinary test of men. Many of us are too self-conscious and too self-centred to be able to give ourselves to them. Some of us have become coarsened in fibre, so that we no longer feel the charm of their freshness. And even of those who do feel it, and who try to associate with children, a great many have so lost simplicity and spontaneity that children cannot be at home with them.<sup>1</sup> It needs a large heart and a pure heart to win the confidence of children. They see past all pretences and all affectations. They know exactly who really want to share life with them and who only pretend to do so. And quite evidently children were at home with Jesus. I wish we had a few more pictures of Jesus with children in the Gospels. And again I do not like the pictures given us by artists. They depict a perfectly placid, slightly

<sup>1</sup> Read *The Education of Uncle Paul*, by A. Blackwood.

sad-looking man sitting very still, while around Him are grouped little angelic-looking figures behaving as real children never behave. And the suggestion is that Jesus stroked their heads, a thing most children detest, and talked improving talk to them, which is one degree worse. I am quite unconvinced. I believe He played with children, and often stopped to watch them at their play. I believe they were quite at home with Him, and would pour out their strings of "whys" to Him, and chatter away freely. And for that reason I believe their society was a great compensation to Him, and a great relief. He was that kind of man.

Beyond that, of course, it may almost be said that Jesus discovered the child. It is at least true that a real understanding of the claims of children and a real sense of their priceless value dates from Jesus. It were better for a man never to have been born than that he should offend one of these little ones. That is what He said, and the attitude implied in the saying was a new one in the world. Perhaps one of the best measures of the extent to which mankind has really learnt of Jesus would be found if we could calculate the extent to which we have learnt to treat children with understanding reverence and a due sense of their priceless value.

9. As I pass on to speak of Christ's attitude to women, I find I must stop and ask myself, Was there really anything different in His attitude to women from His attitude to men? And the first remarkable thing in this connection is the extent to which the answer is, No. Though in that Jewish world women were held to be vastly inferior to men, Jesus never showed any sign that He thought women's problems less important than men's problems. He gave Himself to both men and women with the same generous intentness.

He was, I think, to this extent unconscious of sex, that He must have made women feel that He regarded them primarily as personalities. He looked at them with a reverence which was a new thing in the world. They were not either play-things or slaves. They were daughters of God. I am quite sure that the women went away from meeting Him, just as the men did, saying to themselves, "Nobody ever believed in me so much before, or seemed to expect so much from me, or treated me with such respect." And perhaps if we could realize what that oriental world was like, and how religious men regarded women as chiefly sources of temptation, while worldly men looked on them in sensual ways—I say if we could realize all that, we might perhaps come to think this attitude of Christ's to women the most original, and one of the most wonderful things about Him. He had a constant courtesy toward women which was as far removed on the one hand from contemptuous neglect as it was on the other from the insulting attitude which treats women as play-things.

It is only because the world has been so slow to believe in Christ that women have not even yet got their true place in the world, and have not been given scope to be their complete selves. Jesus has wanted it for them all down the centuries.

Yet is that all? Am I wrong in believing that there was a gentler note in the voice of Jesus when He spoke to women? I cannot believe that He was really unconscious of the difference between men and women or that it did not mean much to Him. I believe that very near the centre of His life was a very beautiful and very deep affection for His mother. I believe He was of those who thank God for the peculiar quality of woman's friendship—for the power women have to under-

stand and sympathize and restore. He had beautiful friendships with a number of women. "Jesus loved Mary and Martha and Lazarus." If He had not been that kind of man, He would have been less than man. We are told that women ministered to Him, and I believe that on His side He was dependent on what the kindness of good women alone could give Him. And if we had only been more willing and more able to learn from Him, we might have found ere this that friendships between men and women of a kind that has no relation to the thought of marriage are very possible and very beautiful, and very, very enriching.

### 10. *His Joy.*

I put Christ's joy in a section by itself because I believe it is a very important feature of His personality which needs to be carefully thought about. The tradition of the centuries has given Him the title of "Man of Sorrows." But how much does that mean? Are we to think of Jesus as habitually a sad man? As we listen to the music of His life does it seem to be set in a minor key? Can that man who lived a life of loving relations to God and men have been left in the shadow? I have an instinct in me that tells me that sad religion is religion that has failed. I see that real Christianity in human beings produces joy. What, then, is the truth behind the title "Man of Sorrows"?

I believe it is true, to begin with, that Jesus did have His own very heavy sorrows. Some of them I have spoken of. He was lonely and misunderstood. Further, He had to stand and watch people whom He loved doing vile things, and that is perhaps the hardest of all things to bear. He loved His nation, and saw His nation becoming degraded. He loved God, and saw mankind

defying and neglecting God. Further still, He made His own the suffering of every human being whom He met. He had no touch of callousness, and therefore His finely tempered sensitive nature was moved to respond to every trouble and every heartache. Nicodemus in spiritual distress, Mary Magdalene in moral distress, bereaved mothers in the most human distress—all alike found Jesus beside them bearing the load with them. Emerson says, "There is no sorrow in the world but ultimately comes to be borne by God." And Jesus was so utterly in tune with God that He also carried our sorrows. Yes, and the cup of His agony was filled to the brim.

But the real point remains to be faced. In what way did Jesus deal with these sorrows? I believe the answer is, "In a uniformly victorious way." The road to joy is not to be found by trying to avoid sorrows. It can be found only by learning to overcome them. And the wonder of Christ lies in this, that from under every dark cloud of pain He emerged with a faith in God undimmed, and with the bloom of real joy on His spirit. I shall have much more to say later of His attitude to suffering. But here and now let us note that He was quite as much a man of joys as a man of sorrows. As Chesterton has said, "A man cannot ultimately rejoice except in the whole nature of things—that is to say, in God." If the sum total of reality justifies joy, then joy may be a noble and sincere thing, not otherwise. But for Jesus it was so plain that in the end the whole scheme of things means intensely and means well, that He could not but rejoice. He was so sure of God that He could not but be glad with a joy that nothing could take from Him.

In a sense the world—that is to say, this visible and passing world—always tries to rob us of our

joy. But Jesus overcame the world in that sense, and found a reason for joy which nothing could shake. To walk through life with Jesus does NOT mean to be sad, it means to have a chance to learn the supreme secret of abiding gladness.

### 11. *His Genius.*

If we had never heard of Jesus of Nazareth until we grew up, and if He had not been wrapped up for us in strange theological clothes—if, in fact, we had been able to stand before Him with our critical faculty developed, and to regard Him simply as a man—I believe one of our first impressions would have been that He was an amazing artist in the use of words and had a wonderful depth and power in His thinking.

Jesus really did talk on the most profound themes in life—of God, and duty, and destiny, and the mystery of pain. And yet we hardly realize that He is dealing with themes which tax the philosophers because He handles these matters with such a masterly touch and expresses Himself in such simple and living phrases. I have always been thankful that Jesus used almost no abstract words, and that He had nothing to do with the technical terminology of religion. None the less He was a VERY great thinker. He had spent many years in thought before He became a teacher, and surely no man ever gave more completely the impression of one who knew exactly what He wanted to teach and had at hand a perfect instrument for self-expression. There is a whole philosophy of history in the parable of the tares and the wheat, and yet it seems to be a simple story which children can understand. There is profound political, social, and even international significance in His teaching about forgiveness, and

yet He puts it into a sentence or two and one vivid story. There are principles contained in His teaching which will have to underlie all sound economics; and the psychologists are constantly discovering that Jesus knew and used their secrets. He had no education of the schools, but He had that superb education which a great mind can attain by first knowing the actual world, and then thinking about it persistently.

And how He can use words! What could be more perfect in its way and for its purpose than that graphic picture of the two houses, one of which fell for want of a foundation! What undying beauty the generations in turn find in that picture of the Father of the prodigal son, who "while His son was yet a great way off ran and fell on his neck and kissed him." Indeed, unless I know nothing at all about literary beauty, that whole story, word by word, is one of the most perfect things ever produced. Then what skill He has in putting truth with immense emphasis! He wanted once to declare that God cares for every individual, and He wanted to say it with vigour. Who but He would ever have thought of saying, "the very hairs of your head are all numbered"? How His sentences linger in the memory after the fashion of all true poetry: "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin, and yet I say unto you that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing, and yet I say unto you that one of them shall not fall to the ground without your Father." There are even vivid little sayings about actual homely life which I think He cannot have uttered without a smile. There is the story of the householder who was knocked up at night by a hungry neighbour and who replied, "My children are with me in

bed, I cannot rise and give thee." That comes as near to actual humour as anything Jesus ever said. One could go on for a long time on this theme, but let me take but one more example. "The Father maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth His rain on the just and on the unjust." Surely the divine poet and artist is revealed in such touches.

And now a further point—the scope of His plans. Jesus was by birth a Jew, that is to say a member of the most exclusive nation on earth, among whom an attitude of contempt towards all other nations was almost universal. He was also by circumstance a peasant and a village tradesman. He only once left His native land, and that only for a day or two. He had no command of the world's books. Yet how He soared beyond all these limitations! When He saw in one of His temptations the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them, He was occupying a point of view which was habitual with Him. The whole world came into His plans. In that respect He was of the class of Alexander and Napoleon, who could not be content with an activity for one nation or even on one continent. The Kingdom He preached was a world-wide Kingdom. The spirit He inspired in men had to go into all the world or deny itself. In one real sense He was not a Jew, but just a brother of all men. He had a heart that could not satisfy itself by loving only Jews. There is a beautiful line which says, "My fatherland is every land, for all lands are my Father's." That expresses the essential attitude of Jesus.

Of course his fellow-countrymen hated Him for it. They thought Him lacking in patriotism. People who really follow Him are still often accused of being poor patriots. But the truth was that He conceived for His nation a greater rôle than it



ever consented to play. He would have the Jews become servants of all the world, bringing to the world the truth which is life. And that surely constituted a finer patriotism than any of His enemies could display. Jesus had a mind that was constrained to face the whole of reality, and a heart that was concerned with the whole of humanity.

### 12. *His Religion.*

As a rule we think of Jesus as the object and centre of our religion, and for that reason our religion can never be quite the same as Christ's own religion.

But for all that I find it a very interesting thing and a very helpful thing to study Christ's own religion so far as that is possible. It is not very easy, because Jesus was a very reserved man. He spoke very little about His own inner life, and He never obtruded His feelings or moods on His disciples. A certain fine dignity enveloped Him always. He was very far removed from the people who like to preach about their own experiences.

And yet on a few special occasions He lifted the veil and allowed His disciples to see into His inner life. It must, for instance, have been because Jesus Himself told them about His temptations that they could tell us that wonderful story. And there are a few other things which He must Himself have revealed, so that we have some materials for this section of our study.

Many people have wished that we could have been allowed to know Jesus as a young man and to study a young man's religion in Him. But the gospels dismiss His story from his twelfth to his thirtieth year with the single sentence "He increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour

with God and man." We shall never now be able to watch Him as He met one by one the problems, dangers, and complications of adolescence and early manhood. We know He remained at home, probably because His father had died and His mother needed Him to help with the six or more brothers and sisters that were born into that home. He—Jesus—with his enormous powers was content to remain quiet and utterly unknown through all those years. He worked at a trade and went about His village life, living very intensely in the inner parts of His being, but content outwardly to seem quite a commonplace actor in life.

That of course is very significant, very. It is worth remembering in the moments when we are very rebellious about our homes. And it is very much worth remembering if ever we come across the suggestion that Jesus undervalued the family and the obligations of family life.

But when the time was ripe He left that home, and the next event in His religious career was His baptism at the hands of John in the Jordan. That event puzzled me greatly at first. All other people went down into the Jordan confessing their sins, and the very meaning of baptism for them lay in the fact that it was the symbol of the remission of sins. But Jesus had no sin to confess. What, then, is the meaning of His presence there in the Jordan? I find the clue when I remember that baptism was also an act of self-dedication to a new life. Jesus was most literally leaving His past behind Him, and was giving Himself to a career which meant many new labours and untold new dangers. How much He foresaw we cannot know in detail. I cannot but think that dimly He saw the cross on the horizon even then. It must have been plain to His sensitive spirit that the world would not at first tolerate Him. In any

case He was saying good-bye to home and comfort and security, and going out to the unknown. He was giving all He had. He was surrendering His whole being with all His powers to His Father, for whatever use the Father might determine. Surely that must have been a great hour! It always is a great hour in any life, and it has to come into every life that is going to serve the ends of God. To give yourself—that is the door to life. It need not mean that there has been anything wrong which must be given up. But to turn your back on self and give all that is in you, and that without reserve, is the only way to fulness of life. And Jesus went through one special hour when His self-giving culminated and took outward form in baptism.

And then immediately He was *driven* into the wilderness. That is a phase of religious experience which we can all understand. Under the stress of any new resolve or any new vision the company of other people will often seem intolerable. By an irresistible inward instinct we are driven—that is exactly the word—to solitude, that we may face the new situation and adapt our inner life to the new vision. The silent places of nature have at such times a sacramental efficacy, and the rugged parts of the world, where no mystery of beauty overpowers us, are perhaps the best.

And after that came temptation. Not before—after! Logically that should not be the order. In actual life it is the order. It is just after we have committed ourselves to some new and higher way of life that any sort of good life comes to seem terribly hard. Temptations old and new rush upon us. It would seem as if evil did not mean to allow us even to make a start. Often the first month of a new life is the hardest of all.

Now about the temptations of Jesus it is essential to realize that they were real temptations. He

was tempted like as we are, by wrong suggestions which came from without or sprang up within Him. He fought the sort of fight we have to fight. He knew all about the pain and the worry and the stress of this matter from within. Even in that respect He was like unto His brethren. For temptation is not sin. We are apt to think it is. We are often so ashamed of being tempted that we carry about a sense of guilt simply because we are facing the inevitable lot of men and women; and all the time it may be true that "there hath no temptation taken us but such as is common to man." Of course there are temptations which come upon us as the result of past mistakes, and which therefore we never ought to have had to face. And these Jesus cannot have known. But there is a certain ordeal of temptation that belongs to our very humanity, and it would help us to a right attitude to such temptation to remember that Jesus also went through it. He faced temptation, and suffered in the conflict, and came through victoriously. In that fact there is a world of comfort for us, if we can but take it.

Just a few words about the temptations themselves, because in considering them and Christ's reply to them we may learn much of Him.

Let us take them in Matthew's order. The first was the suggestion that He should use His miraculous power, and demonstrate that He was the Son of God by making bread out of stones. In other words, that He should use His great powers to help Himself in need. And He treated that as a suggestion of the evil one. Why? Surely, because He knew His gifts were given Him not to achieve any kind of self-advancement, but to be used to the glory of God. It is always possible to exploit our own abilities for our own profit, and by so doing we degrade them. It is also possible to

use them for great impersonal ends, and by such use they come to their true greatness. I suppose this is more evident in the case of artists than in any other case. But it is always possible whatever our gifts. With Jesus it was one great step on the way when He decided for Himself that His gifts were to be used for God alone.

The second temptation was the one in which a dramatic descent from a pinnacle of the temple was suggested to Him as a quick road towards popularity and power. It, or anything else like it, would have made Him the most talked-of man in the country. And could He not have used that position to further His real aims? Why not take that method if it would gain Him the ear of the people? But again Jesus said NO. It would have been to Him profanity to call on God to assist in any such spectacular exhibition. God is not that kind of God. And that is not the sort of way in which God's work can be done. Immediate and apparently great results can be achieved in that way, but they pass and are forgotten. The real work of God is done by the slow and certain method of faithful living day after day, and the carrying of the cross of labour. It belonged to the very essence of Christ's character that He could not and would not adopt any other way. He was even embarrassed by the notoriety which came to Him as a miracle-worker, and kept telling people whom He had healed to tell no man.

I think He disliked mere popularity, and was uncomfortable when the world made a fuss about Him. For He wanted from men something far greater than mere wonder or excitement. To make a stir by doing outwardly remarkable things did not bring the real Kingdom of God any nearer.

The last of His temptations on that occasion arose out of a vision of the kingdoms of the world

and the glory of them. We shall never understand this temptation unless we have realized that Jesus was a man of enormous ability, as I have already said. It was not a fantastic suggestion that He should make Himself politically master of the world. Lowly birth was no fatal barrier to the imperial throne for the man who would pay the price which advancement involved in the Roman Empire. If He had used His powers to that end Jesus might have arrived where Nero or Augustus arrived. And this was a temptation to Him just because He was a man of great vision and unmatched largeness of mind. He was of that aristocracy which by instinct is concerned with the whole world. In some way or other He had to be related to the largest possible affairs. And He might have told Himself that once He had attained to the supreme power He would use it as no one else had ever used it. He may have dallied in mind with the conception of an immediate political reformation of the world. But no! If He had become a Cæsar the world would now know no more of Him than it does of the Cæsars. And He had a greater thing to do. He had to minister—to give His life, to deal with the ultimate springs of conduct, to change the heart. He knew that that would in the end make the political reformation of the world a possibility, and that nothing else would. And so He turned away to His true calling. But I can believe that that was the temptation which strained His being most.

After that special period of temptation the course of Christ's life was set unalterably. I do not think He ever, so to speak, stood at the parting of the ways again, or had to make any great decisions. Point by point He had simply to accept the inevitable development of His chosen career. He had simply to let His destiny unfold itself.—

And yet plainly that was day by day a matter that needed tremendous resources of spirit, and the outstanding thing which we do know about the personal religious life of Jesus is that He had a habit of prayer in which lay the secret of all His persistence and all His triumph.

About this habit of prayer there is not very much to say. He plainly regarded prayer as the very spring of His life. He made room for it at all costs. Sometimes He would go away for a whole night to be by Himself with God. At other times we read that He rose a great while before it was day and went off on the same vital errand. Further, it was natural to Him to speak to His Father on special occasions, so that little prayers of His come into the narrative at various points. He used no special forms that we know of, and He frequented no special building for His purpose. But spontaneous prayer, and also prolonged and sustained prayer were woven into the whole texture of His life.

The study of His teaching about prayer would require a book by itself. Here I am concerned merely to get a true picture of His own practice. It was the central claim of His life that He only spoke and only acted under Divine inspiration, so that the very truth about God was expressed through His activity. And evidently to maintain the perfect, continuous, and intimate touch with God which made such a life possible He had both to use special times and seasons, and to find place for spontaneous prayer even in the midst of His busy days.

There is a particular significance in that fact in one direction. I meet people who profess the utmost devotion to the ethics of Jesus, and regard Him as a supreme teacher, but who also seem to regard personal religion as an unnecessary thing.

They would walk in the ways of Jesus, but become uninterested when Jesus talks about God, or the way into God's communion. It would seem, however, that Jesus Himself could not practise His own ethical teachings without a very constant devotional activity. That fact must be well weighed by those who would honestly face the whole truth about Him.

### 13. *His Attitude to Suffering.*

The really fundamental things in any man's personality are his attitudes to such things as nature, beauty, children, animals, work, sin, disappointment, injustice, pain, and suffering. In relation to these things his real self makes itself known. By his responses to them his character is fashioned.

And while they all matter greatly, perhaps the one that matters most is suffering. The fact of it most rudely upsets any facile religious view of life, and the force of it most drastically tests the quality of any personality.

The most critical single turning point in many lives is the one at which the rude and ugly challenge of suffering has first to be met. No idealism that cannot live in face of it has any real value. No faith in God has any lasting significance that has not endured the shock of it.

Therefore with any religious teacher we rightly wait to learn what he has to say about suffering before we accept him. It is so hard to believe in a good God in face of the universal presence of pain in life that we turn in impatience and annoyance from all poets and prophets who only talk of beauty and of joy. The shepherd prophets who have dwelt in the clean spaces of nature, daily lifting up their eyes unto the hills, and exposed always to



the healing powers of quietness and peace, have indeed produced great hymns of adoration, but mankind on the rack of actual civilization will always wait for such spiritual messages as can come only from those who have been tossed in the turmoil of disorder, disease, injustice, cruelty, war, and heartache.

And Jesus belonged to this latter class. He belonged to "the people" in a country and at a time when the people were oppressed. He knew poverty by daily familiarity, and understood the bitterness which it is apt to cause. He mixed with beggars, and lepers, and the outcasts of the world. He watched the extortions of the tax-gatherers and the callousness of the rich. He saw profligacy at work and marked the agonies which it imposes on the innocent. He grew up in a society where sickness and death cast their shadows on homes and family happiness. Further still, He himself was spared nothing. If He was always blessed with health, He was made to experience in His own person the cruelty of the world's injustice. Men lied about Him, slandered Him, threatened His life, and betrayed Him. He was misunderstood, made lonely, persecuted, and deserted. All the evil powers of the world combined in an unholy alliance against Him. Finally they tortured His body and mocked His spirit. Wherefore anything Jesus had to say about suffering came from one who had a terribly intimate personal acquaintance with it, and we may listen with confidence, knowing that we are not listening to a blind idealist or mere poetic dreamer, but to one who was quite terribly "acquainted with grief."

I cannot forbear to interject here a word about Christ's sheer courage in face of it all. I am afraid of pain. Only by a struggle do I escape playing the coward before it. I notice that many

others are like me. They shrink and cower. We protest and rebel against the element of recurring pain in our education. But if Jesus knew anything of that mood—which may be the case—He at least never showed it. There is a splendid dignity, and a quiet serenity, in the way in which He faced it all from moment to moment. He becomes VERY great in face of it.

But what of His thought about it all? How did He reconcile it with His certainty about the love of God?

Well, firstly, He never taught mere resignation or acceptance. He never said to sufferers, "Your pain is the will of God, therefore endure it meekly." He regarded suffering in others as a challenge to His love, and went out to meet it. His followers have sometimes been heard saying in fatalistic tones about disease, "It is the will of God, and we must just accept it." But the attitude of Jesus seems to me rather to say, "It is NOT the will of God, and we must find out the ways to health." He did not believe in a God who expresses Himself towards men by imposing pain, but in a God who is the source of all life, health, strength, and joy, and wishes to impart His gifts to His children.

Jesus indeed never discussed the mystery of the origin of evil and pain, but at least He would not accept the popular view that if disaster fell on people it was because they had done wrong. Those eighteen on whom the tower of Siloam fell were NOT sinners above all men. He regarded suffering, disease, and social disorder as in the first place an affront to God which He must go to meet with all the resources of His personality. Therefore He was a healer of diseases, and a liberator of captives, and a giver of sight to the blind.

And yet that could not be, and was not, the

whole of Christ's response to suffering. There remained the sufferings which He could not remove. There remained heartache and death as part of the universal order. What of them? May we not say that what He did in relation to all men's sufferings was simply to *share* them? He bore all men's griefs—carried all men's sorrows. If He could not always cure He gave to all sufferers the immense help of His fellowship in their suffering. In fact, He met pain with love—unfailing love—the love that does not cease even when it can only continue by sharing agony.

And here I do not think we can any longer separate between suffering and sin. They are always bound up together, and the worst of Christ's sufferings arose out of His love for sinners. If you care at all about goodness, and then really love somebody who goes wrong, you will know the sharpest kind of pain the soul can endure. And you will have the clue to Christ's agonies. He could not be indifferent to evil, and He would not let sinners go out of that embrace of love into which He had drawn them. Therefore holding for love's sake to sinners on the one hand, and for all the world's sake to holiness on the other, He was for ever stretched upon the cross. Gethsemane and Calvary were only the culmination and the outward dramatic presentation of what was always the inner content of His soul's life.

And by so meeting evil did He not take the one certain way to overcome it? Some students of His life think that at first He expected a rapid and outward victory over evil, and an immediate establishment of the Kingdom. It is a difficult point. But in any case all students of His life agree that ere long Christ realized that the evil embodied in His enemies was going to be too strong to yield rapidly or easily. It became plain that

Pharisaism and Mammon as partners in atheism meant to sweep Him aside, and that there was no power belonging to this world which could save Him. And therefore He turned to the only other way which could lead to victory—the way of suffering in His own person all that evil might inflict. That was indeed a way to victory. The one thing in the universe that is stronger than cruelty, avarice, lust, and pride, is love that can suffer unto the end. And therefore Christ took THAT way of overcoming the world. If at any point in His life suffering was a mystery to Him, He at least found ere the end that by drinking deep of the cup of it He could open a way to life.

We may hate the chamber of suffering that is so central and large in the house of life. We may say that the existence of it baffles our minds and torments our hearts. We may argue about it all, and get no light. But at least, since Jesus of Nazareth lived, we know that those who go and live in that chamber of their own choice are fashioned by its rigors into redeemers; and that love burns and glows at its brightest in the atmosphere of that place of mystery.

I am sure that many will still want to say, "All that may be very wonderfully true, and Christ may show His greatness most truly against the background of suffering, but HOW DID JESUS EXPLAIN the very existence of so much pain in the world, if it was really in any sense made by a good God?"

Now, when we sit down to think about that problem, we find ourselves discussing how much of the world's suffering is man's fault—due to his misuse of the mysterious gift of free choice. And then because man's misuse of freedom does not explain all the pain we pass on to discuss the beneficial quality of pain which makes it an essential

element in any training that is to produce developed manhood or womanhood. We declare it to be so valuable a thing that a God of love and wisdom necessarily uses it to make His children great. And so we try to save the truth that God is love in spite of the mystery of sorrow. And I do not think such lines of thought are either mistaken or valueless. On the contrary, I think we must pursue them till we make ours the truth they are groping after. But I do not find that Christ took that way. He did not deal in abstract thinking to any large extent. His was a practical genius. And it seems to me that what He does say about suffering both by word and life might be summed up in the sentence, "The real proof that God is love lies in the way in which He meets both sin and sorrow, and I am showing you in my life and death what that way is."

So far from believing that the suffering of the world makes it impossible to believe in the love of God, He felt that if we only knew how God shares that suffering, and loves unto the point of agony, we should enter into a certainty about the love of God which would fill existence with both glory and wonder.

And so the Cross of Christ gives the answer to the problem of suffering.

## PART II

### CHAPTER I

#### CHRIST'S PICTURE OF GOD

AND now let me go on to try to tell what follows for me from my trust in Jesus of Nazareth. There follows, first, not merely belief in God, but such a conception of God as transforms life. I find that Jesus spent Himself throughout His life in expressing by word and conduct a view of God as one gracious and loving beyond all imagination. He stands for the view that God is love, altogether love, and only love; that none but loving attitudes can be attributed to Him; that all assertions concerning His vengeance, or His jealousy, or His merely judicial strictness must be denied.

The word "love" did not for me suggest or carry all this wealth of meaning until I had learnt what love is by studying Christ. When Christ tells me that God is love, He means the love that meets all suffering by sharing it; that confronts weakness with a challenging inspiration to courage; that conveys to needy souls the sense of being perfectly understood; that offers to all sinners sympathetic help towards liberty; that gives and spends and never counts the cost. But words quite fail at this point. The only way in which the truth can be verbally suggested is by saying that God's love is the love seen in operation in the life of Christ. It is therefore love that has always something to

give both to sinners and to sufferers which vitally changes the situation. It is love that can always be counted on even by the most unworthy.

As soon as I began really to believe this, I found many other ideas being dissolved away. The god of great parts of the Old Testament was just obliterated. It came to seem a sacred duty to insist that God is NOT the god implied in the cursing psalms, or that is presupposed by the Hebrew sacrificial system. He is neither Eastern potentate, nor stickler for ceremonial correctness, nor harsh judge, nor enemy to any man or any nation. He is love.

A great many stories with which I had been made familiar from a child were shown to be based upon radical misconceptions of God—the stories, for instance, of the killing of a man because he touched the ark, or of the sending of bears to devour little children who had laughed at a prophet, or of the dramatic deaths of Ananias and Sapphira. I am not in the least concerned to try to guess what did actually happen in these cases, nor does it matter to me who made the mistakes of thought involved in them. I am merely sure that God is not the god implied by these stories as they stand. And I think this matter worth dealing with, because to an extraordinary extent many of us get our real ideas of God from the stories that are told about Him.

Again, as soon as I had really understood what Christ is saying to me I knew that God is not one who needs to be propitiated before He can forgive. He is like Christ, who gave Himself to and for sinners without price. He is like Christ, who sought out sinners that by love He might redeem them. Nor, again, is He a God who deals in everlasting punishment. He is like Christ, who forgave unto the end, whose passion was a passion to save.

It involved for me an extraordinary personal liberation to be led by Christ to this view of God. So much that I had been told of God had repelled me. While I was told, on the one hand, that I must learn to love God, I was told on the other hand many things concerning Him which made me secretly dislike and fear Him. I have met some very strange and yet very good people who do literally attribute to God conduct of which they would themselves be heartily ashamed.

But a God like Christ! Who could fail to adore before Him and rejoice in the truth about Him? There was a new music in the world and a new joy in all reality, for behind it all, and involved in it all, I knew there is a God like Christ.

I use the word "liberation" advisedly. It seems to me now that certain instincts within me had always been impelling me towards such a belief concerning God. That was always the God I wanted to believe in. But because of certain repressing forces in the world I had held it too good to be true that God should be such an one. And then Christ let me out of that house of repression, and by believing in a God of love I seem to have come into my true life.

It is not only liberation in that sense I have found, however. It means everything to me to have a real reason for believing God is love, for it reassures me about the universe. I have no use for a religion that can only be attained and kept by shutting one's eyes to plain facts. But who has not felt that the plain facts make faith very difficult? At times they make it seem flatly impossible. Is not our whole house of life rocking on its foundations just now, though many centuries of painful effort after a noble civilization lie behind us? We might well say with R. L. Stevenson, "We have seen Thine evil doom in Golgotha



and Khartoum. And the brutes, the work of Thy hands, fill with injustice the lands and stain with blood the sea." Yes, and since he passed we have seen more terrible things than that brave soul dreamed of. We tremble for our hopes. We are tempted to compromise in mind, and accept the view that the world is an evil place in which on the whole God will always be defeated. And once we have reached that view any religion that may be left us will be merely of the nature of a personal respite.

It will be little more than a device for lulling the soul to rest by the charm of elaborate ritual, or the hypnotic influence of other similar forces. But a religion that cannot live in the open air and in full view of reality is of no saving use to mankind. If the message of religion were really expressed in the jingling words, "Earth is a desert drear, heaven is my home," then the mass of men who MUST deal with earth, and who want to, would turn away from religion as an excrescence. And I with them. If God's great enterprise on this earth is an essential failure, who shall attain to worship?

But if God is love all is changed. For love can outlast all evil and must remain master in the end. If God is love I understand why He does not use compulsion to put human affairs right, for compulsion would destroy human personality, and would superficially save the world at the price of the destruction of human worth. But if God is love He waits eternally offering always the co-operation of His grace, and a communion of love in which men and women may find themselves at last.

I know of nothing in time or eternity that is any match for sin except love. And if God is love I cannot but hope. A force greater than sin is on the

field. The day must come, if God is love, when man will love also, and then an end will come to the vast mountains of suffering, confusion, and loss which spring from human sin.

Europe is rocking, and may rock over into dissolution. But if God is love the race will try again. In the end He must see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied—must, because love never gives in.

And it must be true that God is love. Christ cannot be otherwise explained.

### *The Cross of Christ.*

When I turn to rely on Christ as the demonstration of the love of God, in spite of all appearances to the contrary, I find my mind dwells more and more on the last days of His life—the days of outward defeat which were also the days of supreme victory.

For many years I disliked all the conventional references to the cross of Christ. It was my misfortune as a boy to be told that God could not forgive men until a substitute had been found to suffer in our stead, and that only when Christ had submitted to death on the cross, as a victim in our place, was the forgiving mercy of God available for men. That crude account of things suggested to me a god more like Shylock the Jew, than the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. I felt that the whole view of God which was incarnate in Christ was denied by that doctrine, and that the very essence of my faith was being challenged by it. And I feel that to-day with an intensity which has only been deepened by years and by experience. I look with longing for the day when all hymns and phrases which suggest that view will be expunged from Christian worship.

But having once clearly realized that in all He did Christ was but showing us the Father, that there never was and never could be any opposition between Christ and God, that by no transaction in time was the essential attitude of God to man altered, I then came to ask myself, "What is it that we learn of God by knowing Christ through those last intense and terrible days? What is it about the cross and passion that moves us as nothing else does? Why do we 'survey the wondrous cross' with emotions that defy expression?" And I find the answer for me is this: that by nothing less than the cross and passion could the real truth about love be told.

With increasing clearness I realize two truths about His suffering unto death. In the first place, I see that all other ways of overcoming evil having failed, there remained for Christ but one resource, and that to suffer all the worst that evil could do to Him, and by so submitting to overcome. And plainly He did overcome evil, just because His love remained unaltered. When from the cross He cried, "Father, forgive them," the victory was already manifest and the defeat of evil complete. Their worst done, His love remained unchanged. Surely they must themselves have known in that hour that they were no match for Him. True to Himself and to His Father until the very end, and to THAT end, He became in that hour moral master of the world. We did not know that love could reach such heights. But we know now. We know that God's love has always been love of that quality, and so we hold our breath and wonder. And then, in the deep and quiet places of our hearts, we rejoice with the purest joy the human heart can hold. To be shown the inner secrets of God might well make any man subdued.

But that is not all. Why the agony and the bloody sweat of Gethsemane? Why did not Christ go almost with joy to His final triumph? He must have been less afraid of a martyr's bodily agonies than any other has ever been. Why this travail of the spirit which almost overthrew Him? Perhaps reverence would suggest a simple acknowledgment that we cannot understand. It may savour of boldness and presumption to ask questions about Gethsemane. But my questions have led to so great an answer that I cannot pass it by.

I see that for a good man to love a sinner must always mean agony. I once watched a really loving mother and a profligate son. I learnt more about the price of sin's atonement in those days than I have ever learnt from books of theology. For I saw that by her love she was for ever bound to that boy, and that by her goodness she was doomed to feel his sins like blows upon her heart, and to make his shame her shame. Moral indifference would have delivered her from her agony, but she could not be morally indifferent. The denial of her love would have allowed her to escape, but she could not deny her love. Was he not her boy? Was she not involved with him, body and soul? And so she found her cross. And so, too, there came a day when I felt that nothing in this world held hope for that boy except the love which his sin could not kill. I felt his sin had found its match. I seemed to catch a glimpse of a day when sin would have to let go, and love would remain the victor.

Now Christ had taken all men as His brothers. He had bound Himself up with them in the bonds of family love. Inevitably, therefore, He felt their shame as if it had been His shame. It was family shame. Inevitably every vile thing that any son or daughter of man did was a blow on

His heart. And He also would not let go. Both to goodness and to sinners He was eternally bound. By their opposition He was eternally stretched on the cross. But because He would not let either go, He became a living link to bring those two—sinners and goodness—together at last. At that price His love set out to conquer. It must have been a lifelong suffering. But if it came to a crisis in Gethsemane, need we ask any more questions about the bloody sweat? He loved men so, and they were preparing such infamous things for Him! It **MUST** have brought things to a crisis. The cup that night could not but be fuller than ever before.

And He drank it! And God is like that!

Where in space and time should we go to learn to wonder and adore but to Gethsemane and Golgotha?

It is because it is that love which travaileth still with the world that I am by Christ reassured about the universe. It is because of that love that I dare not to be afraid at such times as I think about myself.

### *Love and Anger.*

I have wished again and again that one might challenge all the words that attribute wrath to God. But it may not be done, for it is quite plain that Christ could show anger.

It would help us, indeed, if we could but be quite sure of the exact meaning of the word in its various connections. There is an anger which Christ wholly condemned. "Everyone who is angry with his brother shall be in danger of the judgment." Nothing could be more sweeping than that. St. Paul commanded his friends to "put away anger, wrath, and malice," classing them with the sins of the flesh. Plainly of the kind of anger

intended in these sayings Christ can have had none.

Yet we are told that on one occasion "He looked round on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts"; and it can hardly be denied that His attitude to those who sinned against children involved real anger. Surely, too, there was passion in His voice when He denounced the Pharisees.

Quite plainly the reaction of a loving heart to oppression, cruelty, and falsehood took the form of a flame of indignation to which the word anger might truly be applied. In other words, love would seem to involve anger. Browning has a fine line about this matter in which he speaks of "Dante who loved well because he hated—hated wickedness that hinders loving." Love is not a soft thing. It has both terrible power and a certain terrible strictness in it. It is not of the same world as mere good nature. It is a match for evil because it reacts violently against evil. Christ's love for any man amounted to a passion of desire that that man should be saved, and therefore it involved hatred of the evil which threatened to destroy the man.

Thus, because there was anger in Christ there must be anger in God, and the phrase, "the wrath of God," must have some meaning in it. It is a phrase with a strange fascination for many minds. It would seem to be over this aspect of God that many men most easily become eloquent. It is so easily converted into a convenient weapon to use against the indifferent, or against opponents. In times of war or of persecution people have found a world of comfort in it. Being quite sure that their enemies were also God's enemies they have gloried in the thought of a coming day when the wrath of God would be let loose upon them.

And thus the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has often been almost wholly obscured.

To conceive this matter rightly is therefore of supreme importance. What I see clearly is that wrath is subordinate to love and a consequence of love. But there is no warrant for believing that God regards any men as His enemies. Men oppose themselves to God, and treat Him as an enemy. But our ways are not His ways.

Surely there is profound truth in the old saying that God hates sin, but loves sinners. He must hate sin, but Jesus made it quite plain that He has a redeeming purpose towards all the authors of evil. And if love is to have this redeeming quality it must have iron in it. We even would have it so. "Be it by water or by fire, O make me clean!" That is a cry we could all echo. If we are to adore before the love of God with the assent of our whole beings, it must be very strong love and even stern love. I find much true insight into this whole matter in Tennyson's handling of the story of King Arthur, Guinevere, and Lancelot. It is only the unawakened souls that love Lancelot and fear King Arthur. To those whose minds were clear enough to see the truth about King Arthur's nature all other men seemed small.

Yet we must be sure that always beyond the Divine anger and including it there is the Divine love. Even for those who have done what they know merits anger love waits, in hope to redeem. The worst exhibition of cruelty, deceit, and cowardice which Christ encountered sent Him to the cross, but His final word, even about the authors of that crime, was "Father, forgive them." Of the God so revealed surely we must say that in the end anger was lost in love, and wrath swallowed up by mercy.

Meantime who shall dare to imitate the Divine

anger? Into our angers thoughts of self do so insidiously enter. We are angry because the evil in others has hurt us. From righteous indignation we so quickly pass to mere resentment. Of the pure passion which only hates evil because it is evil how few of us are capable! What an unlovely thing our anger at our enemies became in the war, though we called it resentment of evil! Mingled as it was with fear and with sheer dislike of persons, it became a poison which corrupted our whole life. Surely St. Paul did well to counsel people like us to put away wrath.



## CHAPTER II

### KNOWING GOD

CHRIST, then, has made it impossible not to believe in God. He first drew from me a response which meant that I must trust Him, and thenceforth He became a guarantee to me of the reality of God. I cannot understand the people who say that though they have no religious belief they regard Christ with reverence as THE outstanding figure of history. In those moods, when I doubt the reality of the Father whose name is love, I find myself acutely at variance with Christ. In His company I must succumb to His quiet, absolute, unshaken certainty about God, or else leave Him. He was not a great teacher at all if He was wrong about God, for God was the centre of all His teaching. He was not even a safe ethical guide if He was wrong about God, for the key to all His ethical teaching is to be found in His conviction concerning God's universal Fatherhood. The whole system of personal relations to which He called men has no basis unless we have one common Father and are in some real sense one family.

And so the instinctive response which Christ awakens in me turns out to be a force binding me to belief in God. I must think in terms of God, and face life on the assumption of God, or else part company with Christ. And on the other hand, when the sense of God has become faint, when the distractions and irritations of a noisy and difficult

world have so far made me a secularist for the moment, I find that Christ's society restores conviction. In the presence of that God-saturated man it is impossible not to believe.

But that is not the whole result which Christ produces.

It is quite plain that Christ aimed at something more than inducing His disciples to believe in God on the evidence which He afforded them. He prayed for the day when His disciples should know God in immediate personal experience. And plainly, if Christ was right, God is a spirit who MAY be known in such a way. If I trust Christ I am therefore left expecting to have my own experience of God. If God is essentially a loving Father who seeks His children, if even our moral unworthiness no more restrains Him than the open sins of men and women restrained Christ from seeking them out, then we may hope to know that love for ourselves not merely as a wonderful reality about which we hear, but as a force that reaches and deals with us. And that is just what has happened in a very great number of lives.

Of the ways in which it comes to pass I shall try to speak presently. But I pause to dwell on this point—that so soon as it has happened Christ's essential work has been done. The deepest and most indestructible thing in us men and women is the craving for a complete satisfaction. Utterly insufficient in ourselves for our own needs, we ask of life that it shall supply a harmonious counterpart to our natures. We seek a life that shall correspond to all our needs, and so give us, not rest, but a satisfying and harmonized activity of our whole selves. And up to a point life seems very generously to respond. I cannot endorse the verdict which dismisses all the staple activities of our daily life with the one word "vanity." I

believe there is something jaundiced in the mood that finds expression in any such judgment. I find real value in varying degrees in such things as athletics, in knowledge, in science and mechanics, in production and manufacture, and any creative activity, in communion with nature, in art in all its forms, in public life, in family life, in friendship, and above all in human love. All that I am sincerely able to say in the vein of the author of Ecclesiastes, is that I find all these things taken together "not enough." When they have done all they can for us there remains a haunting sense of something greater still which we have missed. We do not find a complete environment for our beings by building all these things together into our lives, and are not by them inwardly reconciled. Many of us are left perplexed, and even tormented. And this fact is really the most impressive of all the demonstrations of man's greatness. Creatures of time would be satisfied. But man is left stretching out after something more, though often he does not know what it is he seeks. Jesus knew. He knew that the heart of man is really hungry for the fellowship of God, and that until that fellowship is attained a man always remains weary and restless. And therefore He set Himself to be for us a way to the Father—to help us in our spiritual immaturity to realize His presence and so to arrive home by passing into fellowship with Him. That is why I say that when a man is found of God, for that man Christ's work is done. There will remain for him the lifelong task of learning to cultivate more fully the fellowship of God, and of bringing the whole of his life into harmony with it. But essential and satisfying religion is in operation for a man from the day on which he is able to say that he has been found of God and become aware of His presence.

Let me, then, return to the momentous question

of how that experience is to be attained. How do men pass from the condition of knowing about God on the evidence of Christ to that of knowing God for themselves?

It is here that I find all particular schools of Christian thought most unsatisfying. For each in turn tends to assert that there is only one answer to this question when manifestly there are many answers. Certain good evangelicals have been telling me all my life that real experience of God depends upon holding a certain view of the Atonement which I am happy to say I do not hold. But then those good evangelicals, after all, only compose a section of that great multitude of people who have found God.

Others insist to all the world that the only way into the really sacred recesses of the Divine intimacy is through the ministrations and sacraments of certain churches. But the facts do not correspond with any such claim. Many of those in the churches referred to have very little experience of God, and great numbers outside them have a very rich experience.

Many great souls have insisted most impressively that only through a humiliating sense of sin, that lays us in the dust, can the way to God be found. I believe that for a great many people that is true. But as a generalization it will not stand. Christ never said that, and the experience of many people contradicts any such sweeping assertion.

Perhaps the only outstanding privilege of my life lies in the fact that I have been very rich in friends, both men and women, who have allowed me to try to share with them the perplexities of their search for God, and have told me of the ways in which they had been led. Before the plain facts of their lives all dogmatic generalizations about the way to God fall to the ground. "The wind

bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh nor whither it goeth. So is everyone that is born of the Spirit." That is to me the only true generalization on the subject. There is always an element of mystery, which defies analysis, in the experience of awakening to God's reality.

I can put down a considerable list of different elements in life through the action of which people I have known have been helped towards God. Nature, music, love, remorse for special sins, the sense of failure, the pressure of responsibility, pain, loneliness, bereavement, sorrow, joy in beauty, joy in general, parentage, fellowship with others who already knew God, and above all the influence of Christ. Perhaps in most cases the influence of Christ co-operates with the other forces here suggested. And I notice that a beginning having been made through one of the influences here suggested, people very often go on to other forms of experience of God. Indeed, if they do not their spiritual life is apt to become impoverished. Having entered the city of God through any one of its gates, people may thereafter go on for life exploring its wonders and its joys, its beauties and its glories. I am, however, more and more impressed with one truth about religious experience; namely, that people do not so much go on to attain to entirely novel experiences as to a new interpretation of experiences which they have already had. "Lo, God is in this place and I knew it not." That is what many people come to say. And this seems to me a very important truth. I find great numbers of people groping after God. I have sometimes wondered whether there are any people who do not at times reach out after Him. And many of these seekers are hoping for something strange and mystic, for visions and inward revelations, for sudden dramatic

discoveries. I know, too, that such experiences do come to many. Books have been filled with entrancingly interesting accounts of them. But I am inclined to believe that such accounts of special experiences are apt to depress and even mislead. For the majority of us do not have them. We wait in vain for them. We are not of that temperament. But what does happen to us is that we learn to see God in things with which we have for long been familiar. We learn that our very anxieties concerning Him were the result of His spirit's work within us; that it was Him we were apprehending in our experiences of truth, love, and beauty; that it was Him we were acknowledging when we longed after goodness; that what we so responded to in many human beings was the force of God in them. And thus we realized that we were already so far in His communion. Yes, the world is very full of God. What is needed is a process of awakening in us. There must needs come a point when we cease merely to see beauty and truth, or goodness and love, and reach past them to Him who unites them all, and is known through them all. And that process of awakening comes to most people, and comes most readily through subjecting themselves to the influence of Christ. The partition between knowing about God and knowing God becomes very thin, and then one day we realize that it is gone. That is as near as I can come to putting into words the truth about this momentous process.

And it is a momentous process, because after it all things are different. The glory of the world is a greater glory to those who know God through it. The beauty of love is more beautiful to those who know it is "of God." The zest of life is more satisfying to those who know Him as the real source of all energy. Truth is more desirable to those

who have learnt that it is always His truth. The common experiences of every day in work and recreation, in social intercourse and family life, are productive of a new satisfaction to those who are aware of God in and through them all. If life and the world were pronounced before to be good but not good enough, it may also be said that God, when He has been found, gives us back life and the world glorified and transformed. We do not need to leave the world, and abstract ourselves in spirit from its life, in order to worship and have fellowship with the God seen through Christ. He meets us on the beaten paths and fills the events of the common day with Himself.<sup>1</sup> Religion is not entering another life; it is a way of regarding and handling this life—the true way.

### *Denying Self.*

And now let us pass on to a further point, in dealing with which we shall still be learning from Jesus about the way to God. "If any man," said Jesus, "would come after me, let him deny himself." And He did really mean denying oneself, not denying to oneself various things which we might like. He meant that there can be no harmonious fellowship with Him for those who are still primarily concerned about themselves in ANY way.

I have got to get myself out of the picture if I am to be at home with Christ. Frankly, I do not understand the people whose main concern in religion is to make sure that all will be well with them through eternity, and who also say that they believe in Christ. I cannot bring to Him any fussy anxieties about my future. He has taught me that I am a very unimportant feature of the world, and

<sup>1</sup> Read Brother Lawrence on *The Practice of the Presence of God*.

that the Kingdom of Heaven is all-important. He tells me to stop all my self-centred fussings, and that when I do I shall have found life. The fact would seem to be that a great many people have never found God because they have never escaped from themselves. They want many things. It may be they want only good things, such as character, and goodness, and love, and success in their work. But still they want these things *for themselves*, and are greatly taken up with their wants. And the result is that they do not see beyond themselves; and God, though very near, remains invisible. But God is found of those who discover that there is something more important than their success in any direction, and who surrender themselves to the claims, imperious and exacting, of any really great cause. Those who seek first the Kingdom find that all things are added unto them. They find life, and the life they find is shot through with the sense of God. There was a certain grim wisdom in the test which in certain Calvinistic circles was, I believe, sometimes employed to ascertain the true spiritual condition of individuals. "Are you willing," they were asked, "to be damned, if that be the will of God?" I do not like the suggestion contained in that practice as to what might be the will of God. But I do entirely like the suggestion that a man **MUST** stop wanting things for himself in order to be spiritually healthy. He must want things for Christ.

There is real pathos about the situation of some people I have known. They do really want God. They know that life is a poor thing without Him. They know themselves well enough to be aware that without Him they will always be a little unhappy—perhaps miserable. And yet their very preoccupation with themselves shuts them off. They magnify their disappointments with life, and



pronounce the world a poor place because it does not treat them better. They complain—it may be only to their own hearts—because their aspirations have not been realized, and their efforts have not greatly succeeded. They are very sore about it all, and in the fact that they have not the compensation of joy in God they find their crowning misfortune—the last, worst count in their case against the universe. And, poor souls! they never will find Him until they stop all this worrying about themselves—about either their misfortunes or their successes, and throw themselves into some cause so great that for the sake of it they can forget themselves. They may then for a time say to themselves that they have just stopped worrying about religion. But after a time they will find that they have discovered it. They will awake to God's reality.

There is a still simpler and better way of putting this to which the New Testament often reverts. The teaching of Jesus was that to love is the very crown of life, and that love sums up in itself all great kinds of life. To have learnt to love is to have escaped from self. It is the most direct and complete way of forgetting self. It involves a thorough giving of oneself though the giving is often quite unconscious. And it therefore leads direct to that larger world in which the winds of God blow about the soul, and the stuffy airs of the house of self have been forgotten.

Love is of course often preached as a duty for those who have accepted Christ as Master. But that does not suggest the whole truth. Loving other people turns out in actual experience to be the direct way into the fellowship of God. It is itself the path along which vital religion is attained.

I remember a man who for a year or two earnestly

sought to attain to personal knowledge of God. He waited for "religious experience." He hoped for some such sense of the reality of God as would constrain and compel him for life. But he sought in vain. He became rather depressed, and rather morbid. To the eyes of his friends he seemed to be becoming less spiritually healthy. And then the events of his life took a new turn. He became deeply interested in a Boys' Club. He got so fond of those boys and so busy organizing their affairs, that he had no leisure of mind in which to worry about himself. I think he might have said that he was rather letting his religion go. But he was getting on fast with the business of loving others. And then it came to pass that he awoke to a sense of God that was quite new to him, and the wonder of the truth about the Divine love began profoundly to move him. The activity of loving others in very practical and non-sentimental ways actually brought his nature into that condition in which he was susceptible to the rays of the Divine love. He found life and God by first forgetting self.

I was once shown a carved ivory ball. On examination it turned out to be a series of carved ivory balls within each other, and all movable. At a first glance therefore it seemed a terribly complicated structure. But it was possible so to move the balls about that a hole appeared right through the whole series, and through that hole the light of the sun passed freely. Human beings also have terribly complicated carved insides—mentally, morally, and spiritually. The mass of our varied moods, obsessions, desires, regrets, ambitions, and fears obstruct almost fatally the light that might penetrate to our hearts. But when love takes real command the confusion begins to abate, our natures adjust themselves, and into

the interior of our lives, thus harmonized by love, the light of God is able to pass.

Put differently, we may say that he who loves is in essential harmony with the rhythm of the life of God. He is caught up into the pulsations of the Divine nature, for God is love. And therefore it is but natural that he should become aware of his Father. I understand in this way what St. John meant when he wrote, "Whosoever loveth is born of God and knoweth God."

And so Christ leads to life, and to the wonder of a religious life by telling us to give ourselves to the plain business of loving real people.

Of course Christ meant real love. There is a counterfeit imitation of it which passes as love, but which is only a selfish desire to enjoy—to enjoy the society and the charms of others, and to get pleasure from them. But real love, while it will involve a very full appreciation of others, and a delight in whatsoever is lovable in them, none the less expresses itself in giving and not in demanding. And it is this love of the giver of which Christ speaks. Such love may have almost limitless consequences. He who really loves gives himself away, and cannot know what will happen to the self he has surrendered. Love took Christ to Gethsemane. It often takes men and women still to Gethsemanes. To have tied one's life up with the lives of others is to expose oneself to possible torment. For us human beings it may mean the torment of sometimes hurting the very people we love. Or the torment may come because our loved ones do evil things and we must needs share their shame. But there is no escape. "Love is not love which alters when it alteration finds." And still, in spite of all, loving is life—the only life that finally satisfies these strange spirits of ours. And

it satisfies because it means sharing the Divine life, and so in simple truth sharing God.

And now how far have we got? Having established His authority for me, Christ has gone on to give me a conception of God in which my mind and heart can freely rejoice. He has made the very thought of God glorious for me. Then further under His influence I have reached, at least at times, a sense of God's presence and reality, in achieving which I know that I have found the crown of life, and which in turn has illuminated all the rest of life, and intensified all joy.

And then, further, Christ has summoned me to a certain way of life—the way of self-surrender or of love which is both the consequence and the condition of knowing God.

“The consequence and the condition.” Do not such words involve a contradiction in terms? I am sure at least that they raise a point of very real and practical importance. It seems to so many people that there is always a vicious circle involved in practical religious teaching. On the one hand we are told that we are impotent miserable creatures who cannot control ourselves or do any good until we have found God and come under the control of His spirit. And on the other hand, when we ask on what conditions we may hope to find God we are told to live in certain unselfish and generally difficult ways. Logically the dilemma is complete. None the less I find the suggestion of this vicious circle in the New Testament and in all the Christian literature I know. St. Paul is very blunt about it. He does not hesitate to write in successive verses, “Work out your own salvation,” and “It is God that worketh in you.” The dilemma is present in a great deal of preaching. The reason

is that it is present in life. Religious experience does not submit to logic, nor proceed on mathematical lines.

What actually happens would seem to be something of this sort: we make an effort and do our little best, and then, reflecting on our experience, we see that we did anything at all only because God moved us to it, and so we begin to know Him as one who can be trusted and is really on the stage of our lives. Then, again, in the strength of that knowledge we do a little more, and so move forward, gaining some stable conviction about God's part in it all. In moments of insight we say, "It is all of God." But in an equally true sense we might say that in and through it all the exercise of our wills is required.

God does not reduce any man to the status of dead matter, to be moved from without. He does not destroy personality in saving us. He penetrates our personalities, and we work together with Him, and that even though at times we seem to be working alone.

There are days on which inspiration seems to be given us in the strength of which we travel forward with exhilaration, and rejoice in life's labours. And there are also days when the cross seems very heavy, and our backs ache—days when we can only stagger, while clouds seem to hide the sun, and the jangled noises of a world in confusion distract our minds. But it may be that the former days come only to those who endure the latter. It may be that we must accept Christ's yoke before we can receive His rest.

*Note.*—A friend whose judgment is entitled to respect asked me after reading this chapter whether I do not believe that Christ "saves." "Does He

not," said my friend, "do more than give us a picture of God and of an ideal life? Does He not do things FOR us?" To this I can only reply by saying that I do indeed know that Christ does things FOR us. He leads us to God, and to have found God or to have been found by God is what I mean by "being saved."

## CHAPTER III

### PRAYER

I CANNOT find any inevitable order in which to tell my story. Many things that Christ has come to mean for me press for expression. Particularly does the practical content of discipleship demand emphatic notice. But I must delay that for a little while yet. Jesus tells me when I listen to Him that I must learn to pray. He says it to me in so many words. He says it still more emphatically in the impressive language of conduct. As I watch Him I cannot but ask myself, "What was the secret of the amazingly sustained effort of His life?" His serenity and His energy never seem to have failed. What I know of life makes that to my mind the supreme miracle of His life. I ask myself, "How did He achieve it?" And He answers, not by saying that He was divine and I am not, but by telling me that in prayer lies the real secret of strong living.

I must therefore learn to pray.

I am still involved in many of the difficulties of the subject of prayer. Conceived primarily as a way of getting things done in the external world, it raises problems which baffle my mind. It is when it is conceived as a way of life that I find in it the very substance of religion.

When prayer is thought of as a way of inducing a reluctant God to do gracious things which otherwise He would not do, it becomes a plain profanity.

When it develops into a series of requests that God should alter the natural order in which He has placed us, it also seems to me to savour of impertinence. Further, when prayer implies definite views as to what *ought* to happen in the world—when in fact it becomes an appeal to the Almighty to translate our programmes into history—it readily and quickly becomes an arrogant activity. Many minds during the war were troubled by the thought of English and German Christians praying devoutly to the same God for diametrically opposite results. But there never was a day during the war or at any other time when Christians the wide world over might not have prayed with one voice for the coming of the Kingdom.

I find Christ offering us amazing assurances about the prayers offered in His name. But year by year I have become less and less certain that I can offer my detailed personal, domestic, and social programmes to God in the name of Christ. Such programmes I must have. I must live and strive in the real world. But in my hours of prayer I find myself more and more constrained to lay those programmes before Him that I may see them in His light, and less impelled to ask for His direct action in view of them.

But though the difficulties about the theory of Prayer are very real, I can say what I have found prayer to be in spite of them. To begin with, I find that my sense of the reality of God is always in danger of growing dim. I lose vivid realization even of what I know. And therefore the deliberate exercise of "recalling His glory" comes to have a very intense value. To shut off the distractions of life and deliberately direct attention to God; to contemplate Him as He is to be seen in Jesus; to return to a quiet certainty that He is operative behind all the turmoil of life—that restores one's



spirit, and opens the door to communion with Him. I do not think there is anything mystic or mysterious about this. I have never heard voices or seen visions. But to attend deliberately to what one knows of God does quite certainly change one's mood, and fill one with a very plain certainty about Him. It would seem to me to be the natural way of describing what happens at such times to say that I live with Him. He becomes the main fact of life.

And then, when I have recovered touch with Him in that way I can allow the real world, and my manifold relations to it, to come back into my consciousness. I can face the things which distract and oppress me. Only I have found it good to do something else before facing the distractions, and that is to face the delightful things in life. Of them one is apt to be forgetful when life is difficult. But they remain there none the less. There are the homely pleasures of every day, and the simple human relationships that make up life. There are delightful people in the world in large numbers. There are children. There are the beauties of nature and of art. There are manifold interests and hobbies. And there is love. It is in many ways a good world to live in. And as I face these things I become thankful. As I remember that God is related to all these homely things I find I can offer Him thanksgivings. And so the better mood which has begun to be mine through remembering God is enlarged and strengthened. I become more wholesome-minded.

I notice that different people are helped in very various ways towards attaining that sense of the reality of God and the goodness of life of which I have spoken. For many, at least at times, nature seems almost all-sufficient. Many others need music. Perhaps a majority of mankind need

beauty in some form. Many are helped by some one kind of religious service. Some, at least at certain stages of life, find all services more of a trial than a help. Some need intensely the stimulus which comes from worshipping with others. While there are those who seem to make most progress when they are alone. I believe that all influences which help us to get nearer God are truly sacramental, and I have no dogmatic advice to offer to other people about this momentous matter.

But for myself I find it necessary to take care that I do not become content at times with something which is much less than intelligent worship. It is delightful to sit at times in a beautiful and quiet church, where subdued light rests the eyes, and lovely lines charm the senses. It is very soothing to listen to some cultivated voice repeating prayers couched in perfect language, and then to hear strains of music echoing and re-echoing through some noble building. And it is very easy to sit bemused and subdued through such experiences, making of them a refined luxury, and refraining from any responsive effort of one's own. Perhaps, indeed, our overstrained natures need such experiences from time to time. But I need to be on my guard lest I should imagine that they constitute worship. Real worship involves something more active on our part. It involves at least as much use of the mind as will serve to recall the truth about God and to dwell upon it. It involves a real dealing with God which may be very, very simple, but which must be individual and honest. It involves a facing of our real selves and our real lives in the light of God. Therefore it involves some real work on our part. And such things are apt to be left out if we merely submit ourselves to the soothing influences of places and sounds.

“Facing ourselves in the light of God.” It is easy to write the phrase, but it is no small thing in actual fact. It would be a crushing thing apart from the knowledge of God that comes through Christ. The first result of it is sheer shame. We seem so small and mean in that presence. The complacency with self which we may have maintained in the world vanishes. We understand why Peter called out, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” It is so that penitence becomes instinctive and spontaneous. I cannot lash myself into a fever of distress about my sins, when I merely think of the said sins. I even find it an unhealthy and discouraging occupation to dwell on my manifold mistakes. On the whole, and apart from special times and seasons, I think introspection is a questionable proceeding. It is so self-centred. But the shame that comes from being in the presence of God is a different thing, because, though it may humble and break us, it never stops there. It is a God like Christ who so humbles us. And Christ would never allow any man to sit down in despair. He never broke a bruised reed. And therefore with the shame that comes from facing God there always comes also new hope, based on God Himself. If I am compelled to cry out that I am a poor creature, I am also made bold to say that “The Lord thinketh upon me.” And so in the end this waiting on God brings encouragement and a healthy mood of hopefulness.

In that mood of hopefulness we can go on to face the other actual contents of our lives. And here it is that prayer at once begins to achieve practical results. As we bring our desires into God’s presence some of them forthwith wither away and die. They will not do for that company. Others, on the other hand, gain new force and direction.

And thus our lives are redirected and cleansed. As we face in that presence the work that lies before us, we begin to see how it ought to be done. We begin at least to understand how it can be done to the glory of God. We see fresh possibilities in it. We catch sight of the truth that a man's secular calling, if it be an honest one, may literally become a Divine vocation. And the more that is realized the easier does it become for a man to continue into his working hours his sense of the reality and presence of God. I read of men who have achieved such progress in the practice of Christian living that they did not need to have special times in their lives for prayer. They maintained their sense of God's presence so continuously, and in all circumstances, that the essentials of the situation were not altered for them by going to kneel at the altar. For me and all like me that is only an ideal that lies far ahead. We would say that we absolutely need—some would say that they desperately need—our times reserved for conscious and deliberate seeking the sense of God's presence.

But let me speak further of the results of such times of realization. Reviewing our lives before Him, we bring our worries and anxieties into the foreground. And here again some of them wither away. We see that we have been making a great fuss about trifles—that if we did lose the money that seems to be in danger, or did become ill, or did have false reports spread about us, or did fail to win the praise of men—that such things matter little, if at all. And many of our fussings concern even smaller things than these. In fact, being in God's presence restores a man's sense of proportion, and he becomes ashamed of having let himself be so disturbed by little things. On the other hand other troubles will grow in that presence. We become ashamed that we have cared so little about

the cruelty and the evil in the world, or have been so little put about by the fact that some friend is going wrong. Our hearts inevitably awaken to a fuller sympathy with the real sorrows of the world as we get into touch with God who shares all those sorrows. If prayer makes worldly trifles seem contemptible, it does also expose us to being shaken by the throbbing of the world's real agonies. Beware of the company of the Man of Sorrows, if you are determined to escape your share of the cross of agony which the race carries. Beware of really hearing the talk of Christ, if you wish to remain unconscious of the tragedy of sin and pain that is being played out through the centuries. Yet here again it makes all the difference that it is a sense of God which brings us to this larger pain. I can quite understand the men and women who, being without any sense of God's reality, decide simply to forget the world's agonies as far as they can, and who declare that worrying about them is an unprofitable occupation inasmuch as we can do nothing about it all. But when a sense of God's presence intensifies the agony of a man over the state of the world, it always does something else also. It convinces him afresh that the sorrows of the world ARE being borne by God—that love is at work on the problem of pain—that however paralysing the facts of suffering may seem at times God is adequate to the challenge they constitute. And so it comes that though prayer may increase our consciousness of the pain of the world, it does take the mere fret and worry out of our lives. We cannot merely fuss about something which God is handling. We cannot sink into despair. We are not conquered in spirit. And that, no doubt, is the explanation of the strange fact that some men and women of specially sympathetic natures, and with very sensitive hearts,

are yet able to live in full view of the facts of life with a certain quiet joy possessing their spirits. They know of something that goes deeper into reality than even pain, and so they are in spirit at rest. It is not for them an unseemly thing to rejoice and be glad. The ultimate facts are to them glorious facts. The music of the spheres, in spite of its undertone of agony, is triumphant music. And there is a song of triumph in their hearts of which the full justification will only be evident at the end of all.

It is in this sense that the religion of Jesus brings joy into life. It brings joy because it has for us an adequate answer to the riddle of the world. And the way to become day by day possessed of that joy is to take time to become aware of the truth about God Himself. In view of ALL the facts a man may dare to be glad. It is half views that leave us the victims of depression.

Then there is another thing which a man will do who faces his life in the presence of God. He will think about his friends. Indeed, it may very well come to pass after a while that he will want to give so much time to remembering his friends before God that he will have almost no time for his own affairs. The more sincere our love for people is the more inevitably do we want to pray for them. We can do so little for them. We want God to do so much. For those who believe in a God like Christ, love issues in prayer.

I do not understand this intercessory prayer. I have no theory as to how it works. I do not pretend to know to what extent it works. I am sure that God is not waiting until I pray before becoming graciously disposed towards my friends. I am sure it is not for me to suggest to God what needs to be done for my friends. I can argue in a barren, logical sort of manner for the position that

intercessory prayer **MUST** be quite unnecessary if God is always waiting to be gracious to all men and women.

It is because of experience that I have become a whole-hearted believer in such prayer. I have not only found it to be inevitable if I am really to talk to my God about my real interests, but I have found it to have some strange value for me and my friends. I know now that it is one of the mysterious forces that affect events. I dimly understand how Christ could use such tremendous language about it.

Perhaps it is the case that my friends and I are all bound up together in some living fellowship which includes God, and that the sincere prayers of anyone in such a vital union become a means of releasing the redeeming forces of God, which may have always been seeking access to men and women. Perhaps my good desires for my friends, purified and enormously increased in potency because shared with God, come to have a real power—become, in fact, channels through which God can act. I do not know. I am not troubled by the factor of space in this matter. I do not think space exists for God. And if my prayers for a friend in the same room with me have power, I should expect my prayers for a friend in China also to have power.

In any case I have to pray for other people. The central and tremendous thing which God has said to me through Christ is that I must stop thinking so much about my miserable self, and get busy with the work of liking and helping other people. In so far as I do that it becomes unavoidable that my prayers should be concerned with other people. And I am at least certain that I am of value to my friends only in so far as I pray

about them. To begin with, the habit of praying for them makes it certain that I shall remember them. And if some critic of these words should want to interject, "But you don't need anything to remind you of your real friends," then I can only reply by confessing that I belong to a lower order of beings for whom it is all too possible to slip into a self-centred and easy-going way of life in which one's sympathies for people in trouble become blunt, and one's remembrance only casual and uncertain even for those who have honoured and blessed me with their friendship. No! I need to pray for my friends in order to be a good friend to them. And then, further, I find that by praying for others my desires for them are corrected and educated. I have to want for them only the best things. I begin to see sometimes what would be best for them. I even begin to see what I might do for them, and sometimes how it ought to be done. I become sadder about their mistakes, but more hopeful about their recovery. I become more sensitive to their pains, but more convinced that there is help for them in God. I certainly become more able to see and love the good that is in them.

And this which I have said about my friends must obviously become true also about all the groups of people and all the causes for which Christ has taught me to care. I must bring into my communion with God my care for my nation, and for the victims of its social disorder, and for all sufferers of every kind, and for other nations, and the cause of peace, and in fact my desire after the Kingdom of God in all its manifold aspects. If prayer means realizing afresh a God who is like Christ, then it must have this result. It must produce concern for the things about which Christ



was concerned. It must discipline and train the heart till these great interests come to have their proper place in one's life. Whatever may be its mysterious effects beyond the range of my activities, it is the only power that can maintain my being in a right attitude towards the ends of God in the world. Without it a great many people would insensibly sink back into a narrow life of restricted and self-centred interests. For those who would continue to "Seek first the Kingdom" it is an essential discipline.

And now I may sum up. I have said enough to justify the statement that prayer is the very essence of the religion which Jesus has taught me, on its inward side. Its outward expressions may be very various, but its inner content consists in that fellowship with God concerning real things, which we call prayer. It would not have been enough for Jesus merely to tell us to pray. The whole revelation of God which He has given us is a requisite condition for prayer. There are times when we can only go on praying by standing in spirit before the subduing and yet moving mysteries of Gethsemane and Calvary. We can only pray for sinners and sufferers because we have learnt about the love that bears all sorrows and is concerned about all sinners. But having learnt of God through Christ, the actual expression of our faith has to take the form of prayer. I repeat it is the Christian religion on its inner side.

In a very real sense it may be said that all we ever needed was to have the way to prayer of this sort made open to us. Once we have learnt to pray we are vitally related to God, and need nothing more except a fuller and fuller experience of its mysterious possibilities. Prayer is the thing that makes the difference, that produces results,

that changes lives. I remember a schoolmaster of the best athletic and generally virile type saying to me, "What do you find in religion that really works?" And when I had asked him for his own reply to his question, he said, "I don't find any help in doctrines, but prayer really makes a difference. It seems to me the one thing that matters." Certainly it had schooled and moulded and refined him until he had come to be possessed of a certain pastoral genius for the helping of boys and for running a house on the very best lines. Yes, Jesus did His essential work for us by giving us a faith that makes a basis for prayer, and then by teaching us to pray. For those who had learnt that from Him His work was finished; He had brought them to the Father, and could leave them in Him.

And here I may add that I have found great reassurance through my own experience in relation to prayer. Books of theology have come to interest me less. Some of them seem to me to be laboriously wrong. Some of them bore and irritate me. Many of them seem to me to make a great fuss about irrelevant issues. But the great books of devotion have become more and more open books to me. I am at home with the men who produced them. I know that, though they are very great masters and I am only a beginner, I have something in common with them. I feel that I am on the great road. Even their opinions on doctrinal points often only perplex me. But I find that there was something in them far greater than doctrinal opinions. They had a vital hold upon some great living reality which they could not express in doctrines, but by which they lived. And their prayers have a certain timeless quality and value. The real apostolic succession would

seem to me to be the succession of praying souls. It is they who have handed on the timeless and priceless thing in Christianity. I do not mind being unable to be orthodox in theology if I can live in sympathy with the really devout souls of Christian history.

## CHAPTER IV

### CHRIST'S PRACTICAL DEMANDS

I HAVE now told in some rough way the story of how Christ leads men and women to a living religion, of how He makes God real to them—leads them into the Divine communion, and so opens to them the life of prayer. It is really a story of how Christ brings new vitality and power to men and women. But life is a thing to be used. Power has no meaning except in relation to definite tasks. Jesus never suggested that He had come to call people to a life of passive contemplation. I cannot say that communion with God is not an end in itself, because plainly it is the supreme end of all existence. To have attained it is to have arrived. But the truth would seem to be that fellowship with the God whom Jesus revealed can only be maintained by those who in its strength give themselves to such action as they are capable of. We keep faith with God only through service. We maintain sympathy with Christ only when we labour for the Kingdom.

Now it is when we begin seriously to listen to Christ as He unfolds His plans for the world, and so His orders for us, that the religion of Jesus comes to take on the aspect of a tremendous and even dangerous adventure. For Christ was essentially a revolutionary spirit. He discarded almost completely the "ways of the world." He proposed to turn the world upside down. He proposed to

dethrone the powers that were in control, such as military might, Mammon, and rivalry, and to enthrone the powers of God, which are brotherhood, goodwill, forgiveness, and love. Nothing less than that is involved in the proposal to substitute for the kingdoms of this world the Kingdom of God. And thus following Him has always meant, and still to a very large extent must mean, being opposed to the current ways of the world. No life of easy acquiescence in the present state of things is possible to a disciple of Christ. It is true that on the one hand He gives an inward peace to those who know Him. But it is also startlingly true that He came to give not peace but a sword, to set a man at variance with others, to commit His people to dangerous courses.

What has happened with me is that trying to be a disciple of Christ has come to mean less and less mere worrying over theological issues and more and more attempting to grapple in some way with a disordered world. The practical expression of Christianity has come to appear a stupendous task of very great complexity and yet of urgent and immediate necessity. For the more Christ's thought is studied in relation to the facts of the world to-day, the more manifest does it become that Christ has a solution to propose to us for all the problems of our corporate life, and that it is the only solution. I was brought up to think of Christianity as the only way to "my" salvation. But it has become an almost new thing to me since I saw that in truth it is the only way to the world's salvation—that mankind must choose between the way of Christ and utter failure. And in view of this fact I confess that the question about "my salvation" rather fades into the background, and that I find the question with which the spirit of Christ perpetually and urgently confronts me is the

question of my contribution to the setting up of a new world order. I may even go further. I confess that were this not the case I think I should be found seeking some other religion. For all that is best in me is affronted and oppressed by the mass of modern poverty, and the misery and degradation of millions of my fellow men and women. If that state of matters cannot be altered, and all mankind set free to express themselves in liberty and health, then life is not worth living; the whole enterprise of the human race on earth is a miserable failure, and God is affronted. If these present facts are unalterable, then no such view of God as Christ gave us is tenable. If He made a world which could come to nothing better than this present jangle of oppositions, and this dreary waste of life, then worship would be for ever an impossibility. Or, put differently, if the Christian religion were not directly relevant to this state of matters, if it had not something vital and supremely significant to say about it, then it would not be a religion that could meet the instinctive demands of men and women in their best moods. Even we human beings must needs go through travail of soul about these things. Even we must needs protest in spirit and throw ourselves into the struggle for a better order. And if our religion had no inspiration or guidance for us in that endeavour it would be no religion for us.

On the other hand, if Christianity has the one vital and relevant thing to say about it all, if it does show us quite clearly what is the way out, and further, if it offers to those who accept the challenge of the world the sustaining inspirations which they need, then not only is it the religion which our hearts cry out for, but it is most literally the one hope for the world.

All this view of the matter has been immensely

strengthened and emphasized by the war and the events which have followed it. The smoke of battle and the dust of diplomatic controversy having cleared away, the essentials of the whole situation begin to stand out. It is impossible not to see now that the war and all its horrible concomitants and consequences were the inevitable result of the way in which the race was conducting its life. Wherever human life is conducted according to those principles of aggression, rivalry, greed, and trust in force, results of that kind must follow. They follow just as inevitably as an explosion follows the mixing of certain chemical elements. In other words, the received ways of life were ways which lead to death. In so far as modern civilization was being consciously conducted according to any principles they are now seen to have been vicious principles. Competition run wild was hastening the race to destruction.

And now in view of each one of the roots of danger in the world Christianity is found to have something relevant and profound to say. Racial antagonisms constitute perhaps the most menacing of those roots of danger; and as we stand in awe before the horrible possibilities for mankind which loom in that connection on the horizon we remember that He called for disciples who should set up a Kingdom in which there should be no colour bar. "In Christ there is neither Greek nor Jew, barbarian, Scythian, bond, nor free."

Aggressive nationalism is another of the roots of danger for the world, and was the chief factor in bringing about the recent upheaval. And as we wonder how it may be prevented from bringing similar things to pass in the future, Christ says to those who will listen that other nations are in reality brother nations and that true well-being

for any one nation depends in the end on the well-being of all. He calls for followers who will not think in terms of exclusive nationalism.

The rivalries of the opposed parties in industry constitute another of the causes which in all developed countries at present threaten not only the well-being but even the very existence of society. Production under capitalism has been carried on on terms so oppressive to the majority and so productive of friction for all that it may well be questioned whether the days of that system, as we know it, are not numbered. It may be likened to a vastly complicated piece of machinery which every now and then jams, and which only works with a maximum of creaking and waste of power. And as we lament these facts and imagine what a joyous and creative thing production might be upon truer terms, the Great Thinker tells us that man's true life is never life in rivalry, and that when we learn to do our work in willing co-operation, and only then, shall we find our true life in it.

A further root of serious trouble for the modern world lies in our sex rivalries and confusions. The mishandling of that element in life has been of late probably more productive of sorrow, cruelty, and perplexity than ever, so that to many the right regulation of that factor in true living seems almost more pressingly important than any other. And, while we fumble with our awkward legislative attempts to bring order out of chaos, Christ has a fundamental view of sex to give us which would deliver us both from our cynical laxities of thought and from our false shames about it all, and would enable us to see that here is an element in life which might be so handled as greatly to enrich our joy and to harmonize our restless beings.

I thus find Christianity to be the source of



principles the application of which would save a situation which is otherwise hopeless. The thought expressed in the phrase "The Kingdom of God or Chaos" is, I believe, profoundly true. And the more I study the mind of Christ the clearer does it become that indeed He knew man and understood life, and has been trying through the centuries to teach men the truths which alone can save them. The perception of this truth might surely add a note of sincere urgency to the proclamation of the message that is in Christ. East and west, north and south, in Europe as well as in Asia and Africa, all the facts point in the same direction. There is just one way past disaster, and that is Christ's way. There is just one last splendid hope for the race, and that hope is Christ. I confess that in face of a truth so plain and urgent as that, it does at times seem almost intolerable, if not unpardonable, that Christian people should be found busy splitting theological hairs, or disputing among themselves over the minutiae of ceremonial or ecclesiastical procedure.

And yet a point presents itself here of the utmost importance; expressed in a sentence it is simply this: that Christian ways of life can only be made to work by Christians. I sometimes meet people who propose to adopt the ethics of Christianity while neglecting its spiritual message. They would have us all adopt the principles of Jesus for the guidance of life, but see no immediate necessity for personal religion. Sometimes they would even suggest that the principles of Jesus should be embodied in legislation. And then it is found that on these terms the principles of Jesus will not work. It is very easy, for instance, to talk eloquently about Brotherhood, but those who can only talk about it are very apt in conduct to be found break-

ing all bonds of fellowship and introducing fresh animosities into life. The most Christian principles do not save political parties from internal dissensions. For the fact is that to attain to the brotherly attitude of spirit, and to maintain it amidst the contradictions of real life, is a fine spiritual achievement, to accomplish which ordinary people need to sit for long at the feet of Christ. It needs a very real discipline of the spirit to be in a sincere sense brotherly towards all men.

Or, to take another example, consider the matter of forgiveness. The Christian way of meeting evil is the way of forgiveness. But forgiveness is a fine, positive, redemptive art, and in the hands of those who have not caught the spirit of Christ it rapidly degenerates into mere inaction in the face of evil, which may rapidly render things worse. When Christ refused to condemn sinners He none the less spent Himself on their behalf in a way which awoke new moral forces in their beings, so<sup>6</sup> that they departed from their evil. Often when we merely refuse to condemn we leave offenders so unmoved that they lapse into further evil, believing that society does not care.

It is because of these facts that the world finds it so hard to believe that Christian principles are adequate to the hard facts of the real world. It is indeed these facts which prove that the ethics of Christianity divorced from the spiritual dynamic, of which Christ knew the secret, achieve nothing. It is these facts which explain the rather pathetic course of events whereby so many men and women, who in youth were zealous idealists after the Christian pattern, develop into the rather cynical and weary middle-aged people who confess to impotence in view of the world's needs.

I think it quite plain that the nearest approach

to an acceptance of the ethical principles of Jesus by any political party has been achieved by the socialist party. And yet we are hearing a great deal of talk in Europe to-day about the breakdown of Socialism. The reason for that breakdown is surely very plain indeed. The ethical principles of Jesus cannot possibly be "legislated" into operation. Laws do not change characters. A system of Brotherhood cannot be made a living reality by people in whose hearts the essential spirit of Brotherhood does not yet dwell. The amount of indignation and even of hatred which the workers of Europe have shown towards the possessing classes may be very natural and very intelligible. It is even very easy to be hotly angry on behalf of the disinherited multitudes. But to have been moved by a spirit of anger or hate is a fatally bad preparation for operating another system ostensibly based on Brotherhood. Only one thing produces in human hearts a sincere, passionate, and enduring zeal for Brotherhood, and that is a sincere and passionate devotion to our Common Father. The new movement towards a richer and fuller life must, in short, have religious roots or it cannot have sufficient power to prevail in the real world.

It is at this point that the study of Christianity becomes a very vast undertaking. On the one hand we must try really to understand the essential principles of the Kingdom of God, as Christ has revealed them in His teaching, and on the other hand we must study the world as it exists to-day in order to discover what changes the application of Christ's thought would involve. And this is indeed an enormous task which only the combined wisdom and labour of many men and women can accomplish. The really significant books of to-day

for disciples of Christ are those which handle such subjects as Christianity and the Race Problem, or Christianity and the Industrial System, or Christianity and the treatment of Criminals, or, perhaps most important of all, Christianity and the Prevention of War. In all these directions we need to discover, step by step, the path of Christian advance.

Obviously, however, no attempt to cover this ground can be made in this book. I have tried to show how it is that Christ brings me to this point. For practical purposes this is where He leaves me. He confronts me with this gigantic task, bids me find where and how I can make some individual contribution towards it, and explains to me on what terms my spirit may be kept from failing amidst the disappointments and delays of real life.

For the rest one may be allowed simply to express gratitude that in such books as the Copec Reports and a great multitude of allied books the mind of Christendom is gradually declaring itself, and the application of the thought of Christ to the modern world being progressively understood.

### *The Personal Issue.*

There remains, however, one point of very personal interest about which I must needs say something. It concerns the problem of what a man is to do who, on the one hand, would fain follow Christ and, on the other hand, finds himself involved in a society which is in some respects organized on principles which deny Christ. Now, it is very easy to say that such a man must at all costs put his principles into action, and cut himself free from all complicity in unchristian ways. And I fully realize that there is no force in the objection that such a course might involve a man in great loss and

in very real suffering. The ways of Christ have always been full of risk of loss and suffering. But what does raise a very acute problem is the fact that no complete separation of himself from the corporate life of his time is possible to any man. However passionately I may repudiate certain features of the present system, I none the less live on its fruits and under its protection. To take the most obvious example. A man may find himself wholly opposed on moral grounds to something that his nation does. Many men have thought, for instance, that such chapters in our recent history as the Black and Tan chapter, or, more serious still, the Treaty of Versailles chapter, were so black that they would fain have repudiated all connection with them. But it cannot be done. No man can live unto himself out of all relation to his nation. Even those extremists who have followed the plan of refusing to pay taxes to a Government they had condemned only found that their goods were sold to provide that Government with money to carry on its schemes. They may have thought of leaving their country, but soon realized that that would mean going to some other country where things from their point of view would be worse. No! it seems certain that a man must learn to bear his share of his nation's guilt, and had better face the fact.

Or, to take another example, a man may abhor sweating with his whole heart, but he can never be sure that some of the goods he buys were not made under sweating conditions. He may sympathize acutely with the railway workers, believing that they are underpaid, but he can hardly refuse to use railways. He may draw a salary and try to give good service in return, but he can seldom be sure that the people who pay that salary are making

their money in ways which he can approve. The doctrine that the individual can always keep himself free from all complicity in the corporate sins of society seems to me profoundly untrue. It even seems to me that there is something hypocritical in any attempt to claim such freedom from corporate guilt. I even find that I cannot be right with God unless I confess my share of our corporate guilt, and consent to bear my share of our corporate shame.

It has made a great difference to me to realize these things. It has modified my whole attitude to the mass of my fellow-men who are also involved against their wills in the abuses of our society. No doubt there are men who must one day answer to God for the fact that as individuals they are very largely responsible for the growth of some of the evils of to-day—men in whom the lust of gold has hardened the heart and blinded the conscience. But of the great mass of men and women involved in our industrial and commercial system it is true that they have only a certain restricted measure of liberty, and find themselves, whether they will or no, involved in ways of life and work which in some aspects may outrage their consciences. Till we have perceived this fact we are likely very seriously to fail in sympathy towards our brethren.

And yet to have reached this stage in our learning is, I think, to have come to a very critical point. For it is so easy to say "Oh, well, it's no use worrying; the system is always too strong for the individual, and we may as well accept things as they are." And those who take that further step cease to count for the Kingdom. This, in fact, is the point at which thousands of idealists demobilize themselves. And there is another way. It is taken by those who say, "We will at least

try to the utmost wherever we have control of our lives to free ourselves from complicity in existing evils; we will at least regulate life as far as may be on the principles of the Kingdom, and for the rest we will join with others in such corporate movements towards reconstruction as will in the end of the day bring in the Kingdom fully." It is, moreover, very interesting to notice to what a large extent the individual can so control his life. I meet every now and then individuals who are making so brave a stand against unchristian conventions that their lives have a meaning and an influence of the greatest value. They do not have an easy time, but they do constitute an incarnate witness to a truer and finer way of life.

We are all very apt to be content to join societies, sign manifestoes, and proclaim principles. I do not undervalue the societies, and I believe principles must be proclaimed. But the few who make actual and practical experiments in living on more definitely Christian ways than the conventional ones seem to me to be the real pioneers of that new social order in which Christ shall at last be king.

Personally I have no happy sense of having done my part truly. I confess that there lies a shadow on my life. I am quite sure about Christ, and that He has a right to demand my all. I have never been able to believe that I have given Him my all. Amidst all the compromises which this complex modern world forces on us I seem too often to have lost sight of that clear light which is our guide. I have no doubt I have often decided wrongly even when I have decided deliberately. Of the real business of Christian living I have made a very indifferent success. I have often longed to be caught up in a fellowship of adventurous souls who would support each other while they attempted

more daring ways of life. Few of us can be lonely pioneers. But many of us could stand in with others even for desperate adventures. I think I see many such corporate adventures in the near future. I believe that it is in that way that the Kingdom will come.



## CHAPTER V

### SIN AND FORGIVENESS

IF Christianity does not provide a remedy for sin, it is not a religion adequate to the most pressing need of mankind. But it is equally true that until we know Christianity as the one supreme way to victory over sin we have not understood it. It was said of its founder, "His name shall be called Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins," and the outstanding thing in the story of Christianity is the way in which that claim has been made good. I hope that already these pages have suggested the way in which Christ dealt with sin, but it does seem fitting that something more explicit on this topic should be inserted at this point.

Christianity has indeed suffered from the excessive concentration on this matter which has characterized the presentation of it by many preachers. The only appeal of Christ's which has made itself heard through some of His ministers has been His appeal to the sin-burdened conscience, and in order to win a response to that appeal such men have made it their business to create a vivid sense of sin in those they addressed. The prelude to a declaration of the good news has thus been found in some emphatic declaration that we are all "hell-deserving sinners," or that we are all burdened with a load of guilt. It cannot, however, be said that that was Christ's own method.

He won some men by the sheer attraction of His own goodness, and said nothing to them about their wickedness. He even began with some people, such for instance as Nathaniel, by an open appreciation of their goodness. In order to find an entrance for His message He did not feel it necessary first to plunge men into agonies of remorse or shame.

There are very many aspects of Christ all of which have their own power over the human heart. A true presentation of Him would attempt to do justice to them all. Of the men and women now in our churches it would probably be found that only a minority were driven to Christ as their one hope of escape from guilt. Many were won by His love. Many saw in Him the one great leader for life. Many caught some vision of the Kingdom of God, and after that felt that nothing else matters very much. Only a small percentage have ever been through any profound experience in which they felt themselves to be in a desperate condition because of their sin.

It is indeed sometimes said that the rising generation has no sense of sin. I am not prepared to accept that statement. But it is certain that many in the rising generation have found in Christ reasons for a true and complete devotion although they have never known any particular distress of conscience. Many of them deliberately say that they have no interest in preaching that is "all about how to get your soul saved." And yet Christ has won many of these same young people, and they are giving of their best to Him with a fine generosity. In fact men and women are found loving Christ for a very great variety of reasons, and we may be quite sure that it matters little by what route men come to Christ, if only they learn to give themselves to Him.

But what men and women say of themselves collectively and in public is one thing, and the truth as they reveal it to their friends is often another thing. I have the best of reasons for saying that whether or no a sense of guilt is common to-day, the misery of being in bondage to bad habits is very common indeed, and that the one thing which thousands consciously want is the knowledge of some way in which they may be delivered from the power of evil. Men and women are still often the victims of jealousy, and despise themselves for it without being able to deliver themselves. They still suffer from hot and unruly tempers, and after giving way suffer tortures of shame. Unruly sexual desire still plays havoc with the lives of thousands who yet want to find true life. Secret and deplorable habits still torment great numbers. What is now called "slackness" still hampers and torments many who have fine latent powers in their beings. The lust for excitement still misleads multitudes who in their calmer moments really want to make a creative and dignified thing of life. And one and all these people would say, "If Christianity really has for us the secret of how we may be delivered from our present bondage, then it is the one thing which we vitally need."

Christianity does meet the need of such people. And yet they often say they have tried it in vain. They say they have been to church and got no help, or that they have tried to pray and found no relief. They say that theology only perplexes them, and that sermons hardly ever seem to deal with the matters that really concern them. Perhaps nothing is more needed to-day than a fresh, sensitive, and sympathetic treatment of the condition of such people, so that they may find in Christ the deliverer whom they are already seeking.

First of all, what such people need is to be delivered from the incubus of despair which is rooted in their own pasts. They have failed so often that they are unable to hope. They seem to themselves to be cut off from the springs of goodness, and to be out of touch with God. They suffer from inferiority complexes. They have in part lost their own self-respect, and have no faith in themselves. Possibly they resent criticism, but it is because they find it only depressing—not because they think it without foundation. They say they have no will power in respect of their particular affliction.

What Christ has to say to such people is first of all that they are not cut off from God. That is the essential meaning of forgiveness. Though they themselves may feel that they have created a bar between themselves and God, God does not recognize that bar. His love will not suffer separation from any of His children. Christ would not allow the shameful pasts of men and women even to cast a shadow on His friendly relations with them. So intense was His love that He must have seemed to people to be unconscious of those unhappy pasts. That is God's way with us. To the people who feel enslaved by their own past record He says, in effect, "Leave that past with Me. I can deal with it." And He offers unconditionally His own fellowship to those who will but take it.

To be able sincerely and simply to believe this is the first great step towards deliverance. To know that you are still in vital touch with goodness and with love changes the whole situation. Men who have been living in a dark world of failure and self-contempt feel that they have emerged into the light when they at last really believe God still loves them, and purposes good for them. I have seen this happen with most wonderful and

dramatic suddenness, so that men who had got very far down experienced a change in one night which left them rejoicing with their whole hearts in the love of God. And I have known that new joy persist year after year till life was entirely changed. Yet the story of dramatic experiences is apt to mislead. With a majority things happen more gradually. The essential truth here is that people pass out from a dark world and into a world of hope, so soon as they come to believe in any real way in the active love of God for them. Any real appreciation of that love brings with it release from despair and self-contempt. Many would say that to be believed in is the essentially curative experience, and the love of God includes and embodies a belief in our capacity for a true life.

The reason why the story of the cross has always played, and always will play, so large a part in the deliverance of men is that for a great many people the cross is the only thing that fully and finally convinces them of the love of God. Bunyan has told us that when he was able really to believe the familiar words, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love," sweetness returned to him and continued to rest upon him. And it has been by going in spirit to Calvary that most people have become able to believe that essentially incredible mystery. People who say that they have tried religion in vain are generally people who have not gone on trying religion till it brought them to this releasing persuasion. They have allowed their dissatisfaction at churches or their perplexities about many things to prevent them from arriving at the great discovery. If I might say it without harshness I would like to say to a great many such people, "You have only so far played with religion. You have never come to close quarters with its central truth."

Really to know the love of God revolutionizes a man's interests. He CAN no longer go on in the old ways. His whole scheme of values is upset.

And for the rest the way of deliverance through which Christ can and will lead us consists not so much, if at all, in any conscious trampling on old desires or fighting with desperation the old temptations, as in simply entering on the new life to which Christ calls us. No man can truly know the love of God without wanting to give some response to it, and when we ask of Christ what that response must be, He replies, "Seek ye first the Kingdom of Heaven." In other words, we find our deliverance from old ways of life which we despise by accepting quite new ways. We attain to freedom by putting on the yoke of the Kingdom. When its interests and activities engross our beings we leave out the old and deplorable ways of life because we have no room for them, and finally they cease to have any interest.

What needs to be said here is that Christianity saves us from evil ways if we take the whole of it, and allow it to dominate and drive us. What a great many people are really asking for is that they should be allowed to go on with their old lives which are centred in self, but that they should be delivered from certain particular evil habits which they despise. They want enough religion to preserve a worldly life from vice, or an easy-going, self-centred life from bodily indulgences. And they are asking for the impossible.

Christ can cure us if we give our whole selves to Him, but not if we offer Him only a corner in our lives. The only thing that will drive out old and unwholesome interests from our lives is to make room for new and wholesome ones. The cure for evil thoughts is to think of whatsoever things are lovely. The cure for all the habits in

which we abuse our humanity is to devote our humanity without stint to great inspiring purposes. And of these the greatest is the purpose of the Kingdom.

Of course it will be said by some at this point, "That may be all very true, but we have not got these higher interests. We do not find ourselves interested in the affairs of the Kingdom. What we really care about is having a good time, though we do want to escape from our bad habits. We find it very heavy going when we try to constrain ourselves into sympathy with Christian objects and Christian ways of life." I believe the answer to that lies in the fact that God does work inward changes in those who submit themselves to Him. No account of the process of salvation can be even approximately true which leaves out the fact that God has His own ways of entrance into our lives, and proves His presence by inspiring in us new desires and by kindling new interests. Our hope is in Him, and in Him alone. But God does not force His way into men's lives. Only the very few have overwhelming experiences of Him. With the great majority of us it is necessary that we should wait on God in prayer, and by silence and submission before Him give Him His opportunity to move us from within. In fact the practice of prayer belongs to the very essence of salvation, and prayer is very seldom easy at first. For most people it is hard labour. But it is the way of life.

We are apt to expect not only that Christ should open out to us a way of deliverance, but that the way should be made easy. We are apt to ask for a spiritual sanatorium in which everything shall be done for us. At times it seems to me people really ask that God should make them good while for their part they remain passive.

Obviously and fortunately that is a sheer impossibility. It would mean the destruction of our essential personalities if we were compelled from without. Even God cannot make anything of spiritual worth of us except by the way of gracious co-operation with us. The very end we desire is a state in which we shall by the exercise of our own wills choose and do the right, and that end cannot be achieved unless all the way we co-operate with the divine grace. Jesus Himself left no one in any doubt that the way would prove difficult and uphill. And if the way is also wonderful and glad, that is entirely because He is on it with us.

But it may well be asked at this point, "Is that the whole truth of the matter? Is there not some element in Christian experience in virtue of which a man may feel secure? Is there not something which can be said to be accomplished from the very first? Is the Christian life *ONLY* a long striving after an end which is in doubt all the time?"

The answer to those questions brings us to the very crown of the Christian faith. There is indeed a sense in which all is well from the point at which a man enters upon any vital relation to God. He is not yet good, and may have many a struggle before him. But all is well because God never leaves off a work He has begun. "I am poor and needy, yet the Lord thinketh upon me." The man who can say that has the one great security there is for any of us in time or eternity. His love will never leave us and never be satisfied short of complete victory. We may look around and behind and before and then dare to say, "We are persuaded that *NOTHING* shall separate from the love of God." And therefore even while we are yet so full of faults we dare to rejoice.



## CHAPTER VI

### THE CHURCH

THIS book is in large measure a plea that the churches should find room within their borders for those who desire to be loyal to Christ, but who cannot accept a number of orthodox positions. Now that very plea assumes that it is an important matter for one who would be loyal to Christ to join the fellowship of some church. But is it? What is the real relation between these truths of which I have been trying to speak and the institutions which men call churches? It is the plain fact that Christ attracts many whom the churches do not attract. To think of Christ is to think of beauty, freedom, spontaneity, and infinite warmth of heart. Churches, on the other hand, often suggest rigid traditions, dogmatic exactness, authoritative control, the acceptance of mere custom, and a general attitude towards life which is more concerned to constrain than to liberate. To be among the churches is to be exposed to the working of many of the strange and petty aberrations of which human beings are capable. A religious official is almost inevitably more or less an unattractive object to all free spirits. We think of Christianity as Christ preached it and it suggests the thrill of a great and dangerous campaign, the greater thrill of being under the influence of a great and radiant personality, and the joy of handling beautiful and creative ideas. We get involved in the life of the churches

and find it resolves itself into meetings of Committees and Boards, of Assemblies and Conventions; that the officials of organized Christianity are much concerned about properties and funds; that books of order or volumes of canon law or precise regulations of many sorts receive much attention. And our spirits declare that from Galilee to all that is a far cry. No doubt the Church has created buildings which for sheer dignity and true beauty rank among the greatest possessions of the race. No doubt the Christian inspiration has produced triumphs of creative art in music, poetry, painting, and architecture, for which no one can be too thankful. But there is also a sad other side to the picture. There are buildings used for worship which are so ugly that it seems as if only wicked men could have created them. There are hymns in use which are not poetry and tunes which are not music. And then there are ordinary parsons, like myself, and the ordinary Christians of the churches. Oh yes! the Church is certainly a problem and a puzzle to many whom Christ has attracted.

Further, it is very plain that to anybody who shares the view of the Christian religion suggested in these pages it must seem that the churches have often been plainly disloyal to their Lord, that they have been silent when the world most needed to hear a witness to exacting Christian truth, and have in cowardice compromised with the world order instead of standing for the Kingdom of God. I will not expand that point. I feel it too intensely.

And so I come back to the central question of the relation of the truths which are in Christ to the institutions called after Him. I get very little direct help towards an answer from any of His reported words. The really astonishing thing is that while His followers talk incessantly about the

Church He Himself said so very little about it. That He contemplated an elaborate ecclesiastical organization such as the Church of to-day would seem to me very doubtful. That He was not interested in the question of detailed organizations would seem to me certain. And, further, the idea that Divine grace can only be received through certain organized and official channels seems to me to be untrue to the very essence of what He taught concerning the Father. I really feel that the mind which is primarily an ecclesiastical mind is not a Christian mind. It is very hard for me and such as me to fit into one picture Jesus the Carpenter of Nazareth and spiritual peers, or the elaborate service of the altar as it is to be seen in many places. I know from within what are the reasons why the natural and lawless man dislikes the Church. But it is a very different matter when minds awakened to joy in certain great Christian truths find the Church more of a problem than an inspiration.

And yet my answer to the question of this chapter is quite definitely an affirmative one. I think it is very important that those who would be disciples of Christ should join some branch of the Church provided they can do so with absolute intellectual honesty. I do so because the religion into which Jesus leads men inevitably draws them close to one another. To begin with, they have a common centre of interest. They have in common the greatest thing in their lives. The bond between people who sincerely call Jesus "Lord" is inevitably a strong one. In time it supersedes all other bonds with many people. At least it challenges those bonds, even family and national ones. There comes a point in the experience of many disciples when they are entirely at home only in the society of other disciples. Only with them can they be of one mind and of one heart.

They believe the same things and desire the same things; and thus they come to constitute a fellowship of a peculiarly intimate and enduring kind. It is quite plain that this happened with the early disciples. They came to constitute a very closely knit society, not because of any conscious decision on their part, but through the inevitable working of their common beliefs, joys, and hopes. They loved one another, in fact, because they all loved Christ.

This result has gone on happening ever since. It is true that the organized society called the Church has been split again and again, and that the divisions among nominal Christians have been very bitter and scandalous things. I believe the reason for that has always been that men had come to put other things than love for Christ in the forefront of their lives—things like theological doctrines or questions of ecclesiastical or ritual procedure. But always when pure devotion to Christ Himself has sprung up in simple and sincere hearts people have been seen forming themselves into very close and intimate fellowships. The influence of Christ opens the human heart. He teaches people to appreciate one another. Because He delivers His friends from such petty qualities as jealousy, censoriousness, and narrow prejudice, He makes them good members of the human family, and they discover the attractions of ordinary people. In a word, if following Christ means in practice loving other people, then inevitably Christians must come to form happy societies of people reconciled to one another.

Now, I believe that the only true definition of the Church is that it is the fellowship of believers, and when the Church is understood in that sense then it may be said to be the inevitable product of devotion to Christ, and those who shut themselves out from

it are arresting the work of the spirit of Christ in their own lives. I have met people who claim that they can be quite as good Christians out of fellowship with other Christians as in such fellowship. I respectfully doubt it. Such people often become narrow with that strange brand of narrowness peculiar to those who think themselves very broad. They are hard put to it to escape that odious quality called "superiority." Because they generally only appreciate one type of person and one kind of Christianity they fail to attain to any real catholicity of spirit. And these things mean that they cease to be in complete spiritual harmony with Jesus.

I once heard a minister say that when he first met the people in his first congregation they seemed to him a very peculiar, odd, angular, ignorant, and stupid set of people, so that he found himself longing for the congenial society of the men and women he had known in his student days. But when he had learnt (as he did) to appreciate, honour, and love those very people who had repelled him at first, I am sure that he was a far truer Christian and a far bigger man. Yes, I am afraid that a searching analysis would discover some rather ugly qualities at work in those liberal-minded persons who "cannot stick" the people in the churches.

There is a second force that drives Christian disciples together. Christ entrusted to them an enormous task. They were called to set up the Kingdom of God in a pagan world. That was the essential practical content of their discipleship. And that fact not only drew them together as men are always drawn who have a common interest—as, for instance, collectors of pictures are drawn to one another—rather did it drive them to depend upon one another out of sheer necessity. As isolated individuals they were largely helpless

before their task. Its magnitude was such that only the power of a united society could cope with it. It required for its fulfilment all the varied powers which men and women of different temperaments could bring to it. It required prophetic preachers, competent teachers, skilled organizers, men with the gift of healing, and so on. Further, its difficulties and dangers were so great that individuals needed all the support and stimulus which they could get from the sympathy of their fellow-workers. And thus the more faithful the disciples were to their commission, the more of a reality did that fellowship become which is called the Church. So strong indeed was their instinctive tendency towards community of life, that they at first proposed to be a society based upon the principle of community of goods. And though that plan proved too difficult for them in their immaturity, it does not follow that we may not yet find some such plan to be essential to the full expression of the Christian principle.

Now, it is still the requirements of the practical side of Christianity which make association with other Christians so essential for the individual. I am sure, for instance, that something must be done in Christ's name about the slums. But I am equally certain that alone I can do nothing. I am equally sure that something must be done to send the truth that is in Christ to every corner of the world, but as a single individual I am quite helpless before that necessity. Something must be done to confront mankind with a sincere, wise, and complete witness to Christian truth, but for that task no individual is adequate. Working in unity of spirit and harmony of purpose, the Christians now in the world might do almost anything. As mere individuals out of fellowship with one another they have very little power.

It really is a relevant thing to ask those Christians who propose to live their lives apart from the churches, and out of association with other Christians, what they propose to do about the conduct of Foreign Missions, or about Christian reconstruction in the home country, or about Christian education in general. And before the force of such questions any answer that should amount to a mere saying, "But I don't like the Church," would seem very trifling and petty.

*Further Truth about Fellowship.*

This subject of the nature of the Fellowship produced by a common interest in Christ is worth pursuing further. I am not at all concerned to depreciate the fellowships which come into life in other ways. A cricket club may produce very real fellowship, or a trade union. A group of people running a school or a college or a business may attain to very real fellowship. Notoriously they very often miss it, but I am sure that they also often attain it. A ship's company or a regiment in the army have sometimes come to have some of the characteristics of a fellowship. I see, of course, that such fellowships are in their very nature restricted. You have to be a cricketer, or a weekly wage-earner, or a scholar, or a sailor, or a soldier, to get into them. They necessarily exclude more people than they include. The Christian fellowship, on the other hand, though it automatically excludes those who have no interest in Christ, is otherwise inclusive of all sorts and conditions of men. It will not recognize nation, or race, or class, or sex, or differences based on employment. It ought to be the most enlarging and interesting of all possible forms of fellowship.

When it becomes truly Catholic it will be very wonderful.

But even as it sometimes appears in experience now, such fellowship has wonderful results which are worth noticing very carefully, because they illustrate the actual way in which Christianity works. I notice, for instance, that when a group of men and women drawn together by a common interest in Christ have really accepted one another, and begun together to seek for truth or to render service, they inevitably become happier people. One by one they escape from that loneliness with which modern life threatens so many of us, but against which the human heart rebels. They take a new delight in life because it is life shared with others. It was not till I had had some experience of this that I understood the radiant joy of the Early Church. Life was never meant to be lived in isolation. Men and women shrivel up when they are too much alone. But in the cheering atmosphere of real fellowship they find the real joy which life ought to contain.

Then in that warmer and happier air I notice that most people—perhaps not all, but certainly most—blossom out into new beauty of character and graciousness of manner. Angular, awkward, and shy people lose their self-consciousness, and become natural and attractive. Their powers, which had been inhibited by isolation, are released and find new scope. They discover the world to be a warmer and a more congenial place than it ever seemed before, and they respond by being themselves nicer than before.

And, of course, a third thing happens. When people have become happier and nicer they of course become better. The very sense that others are with them in spirit gives them a new courage for



difficult tasks. Because their own hearts have been awakened they acquire a new power to love others. Bitterness and mere anger at life are replaced by an inspiration to control things by the power of the heart. They find the Christian way at least a much more possible way because they have companions upon it.

And thus it turns out that fellowship plays a vital part in the life of discipleship. Most people just cannot follow Christ by themselves. I do not think He ever expected them to. The thing becomes possible only because disciples come to make up a society in which all the members in spirit support one another. There are people who find it enormously difficult to pray by themselves but who pray with deep feeling and sincerity in the fellowship. There are many to whom a sense of God's presence comes through fellowship, more vivid by far than anything that comes to them in any other way. And those who have experienced these things learn that in a most real sense a fellowship becomes an organ of the Spirit of God, or a channel through which God reaches them. I have been surprised to find how far I have got along this line towards the position that the Church is necessary to salvation. I am really sure that it is not. I am sure we ought not to say exaggerated things about the place of fellowship in Christian living. I am sure that many of the most wonderful experiences of God of which human beings are capable have come to them when they were alone. And further, I am sure we ought not to be content to live on any fellowship. If we do we are in danger of living on the religion of other people and of having none of our own. We should, further, find ourselves in the position of those who receive much and give little, for nobody can go on making any real contribution to the life of a fellowship who has

not a very real life towards God of his own. But all these things having been said it is, I think, true that the fullest life possible to anybody is life in fellowship, and that if we try to live as separate individuals we impoverish ourselves.

Still further, it turns out in experience that a living fellowship has wonderful powers. As an instrument for the discovery of truth it has larger powers than is generally realized. For it happens, at least at times, that when a group of people who really trust each other give themselves to a corporate search for truth they attain to a richer and more balanced result than any one of them could attain alone. People of different temperaments have different things to contribute towards the complete realization of truth. I think men and women have different things to contribute in many cases. The young and the middle-aged have different things to give. And so it is only in so far as we are able to gather and combine these varied contributions that we even begin to get a result as rich and many-sided as truth herself. It cannot have escaped the notice of many that the contributions of able men of great gifts who work in isolation are often seriously one-sided in spite of the ability of their authors. When both sides in any controversy can be stated with force and persuasiveness there must be something true in both, and the combination of such aspects of truth into a whole is a work that can only be done by groups of people who work in fellowship.

A further practical result that often follows is that a fellowship becomes probably the best human institution for the giving of advice. I would rather refer a personal problem of my own to a group of friends who make a fellowship than to any one of them alone. Simply because the group is wiser than the individual. There is something

intimate and yet impersonal in the work of a group in this connection. The merely individual prejudices of the members cancel out and the mind of the whole is often a very reliable guide. And if this is so, it need surprise no one that some people have found a certain strange confessional value in such fellowships. To some people it is peculiarly difficult to confess to any single human being. Doing so involves a very intimate relationship with that other person, from which some people shrink. But to consult a group of friends about a personal problem, even though the presentation of it involves the admission that you have "been an ass" is often quite easy. And perhaps what operates here is the fact that a mere individual may be unduly severe and in some respects biased, while a group is more likely to represent the generosity and lovingkindness of God.

But now, though all these points which have been culled from real experience seem to constitute a very strong case for membership of the Church, I know that some will still want to reply, "These things may be true concerning fellowship, but they are not true concerning many congregations that claim to be sections of the Church. In some of them fellowship seems to be conspicuously absent, so that we come away from their services feeling more and not less alone in life."

That is indeed to my mind the most serious indictment that can be brought against any congregation. If it were in any case entirely true, then I should feel that such a congregation was not a part of the Christian Church. For to my mind fellowship is of the essence of the Church. But I think it may with truth be said that things are very rarely quite as bad as that. Nearly all congregations have much to learn in the matter, but most have at least made a beginning in the matter

of fellowship. And therefore it would be a generous thing, even for those who feel acutely the absence of the due amount and quality of fellowship in a congregation, none the less to join it and to help to create in fuller measure that priceless reality. The alternative is that the critics should stay out of the existing churches and make a fellowship of their own. But is another church a tolerable suggestion? And would such a fellowship escape the danger of becoming either "precious" or "superior" or both?

I have neither the gifts nor the inclination necessary to discuss the question of how the Church ought to be organized. But it would seem to me really important to put that question into its proper place. I find it quite impossible to imagine Jesus of Nazareth being greatly concerned about details in such a connection. He seems to me to have been largely indifferent to such questions, and the idea that any one method of church organization has any necessary relation to His religion appears to me frankly unthinkable. Surely it would be a great gain to us all if we could but agree to put all such questions into some secondary and subordinate place! No doubt it is plain that church organization should be both flexible and efficient. Without efficiency the affairs of the Church fall into chaos, but without flexibility organization becomes an offence against the spirit. And beyond that surely it may be confidently said that one form of organization is likely to prove best for certain kinds of people and another for other kinds. It can hardly, I suppose, be doubted that the Presbyterian form of organization really suits the Scots. But is it not equally plain that Episcopal organization suits the English and many other peoples? If we could but put such matters into the place that really belongs to them we might arrive at a sense that the Church

really is in a very real sense one throughout the world. The things which we all have in common are the really great things. The things about which we differ need not divide us unless we choose to allow them to do so.

I should say, for one, that the more I care about Jesus Christ Himself the more possible do I find it to be at home in any Church. In many quarters of the Roman Church there is manifest a simple devotion to our Lord which could hardly fail to draw the most ardent Protestant into sympathy. And Romans who truly love Him have often expressed the sense that they on their part were able to feel at home in Protestant worshipping communities.

And finally, as to forms of worship, is not the same contention even more true? Temperaments do so differ, that the ways of worship must needs be almost endlessly various if the needs of all are to be met. The one serious mistake that can be made in this connection is to claim for any one form of worship exclusive validity. That indeed involves the sin against the Holy Ghost—the sin of refusing to recognize the work of God though it is manifestly in progress. And were this point but simply and generally recognized an enormous stumbling-block in the way of realizing our unity would have been removed. I have nothing to offer in criticism of either the Quaker or the Ritualist until one or other of them begins to claim that his way of worship is the way in which all men OUGHT to worship. “Neither in this mountain nor yet at Jerusalem, for God is a spirit.”

## CHAPTER VII

### LIFE BEYOND DEATH

THE first point at which religion begins to be interesting to great numbers of people is the point at which it turns to speak of what lies beyond death. Apparently many can get along in this life without feeling compelled to ask questions about ultimate realities. They seem satisfied with the things which can be seen and felt. But death confronts us all with a rough question which none can escape. Before its remorseless power the strongest, the proudest, and the most self-sufficient have to bow. It breaks in on the communion of love, tosses our designs to the winds, and claims mastery of the whole situation. What wonder that the race has always been intensely eager to know what may lie beyond! What wonder if many religions are mainly concerned with this mystery!

Therefore those who look to Christ for light come at last to Him with their questions on this subject. Some do not come for many days. Some reach middle age without having had to look death in the face. Life absorbs all their interest. They even resent the large place occupied by this subject in hymns and prayers. But at some point the question arises for all. They have to look on the lifeless form of one they loved, and want to deny that death can conquer life. Or they find themselves near the dark doorway, and find fear and

wonder stirring in their minds. So all of us would feel that Christ had failed us had He no clear word for us at this point.

I find that two things impress me about Christ's sayings here. One is the absolute calmness and assurance with which He does talk of the life beyond, and the other is the very limited scope of His teaching about it. Some few things He does say with almost irresistible authority, but great numbers of our eager questions He leaves unanswered. He gives us enough to live on and enough to die on, but He does not satisfy our curiosity.

The assurance I really long for comes to me from Christ's whole picture of God. If God be *that* God, then all must be well now and for ever. If *that* God be in control of all things, then death can achieve nothing which love does not permit. If even in this life we may enter into the communion of God, then we have a dwelling-place that is eternal. If love be the ultimate fact, then our dear ones who pass out of sight remain under the dominion of love, and I could ask no better thing for them.

If Christ was wrong about God, I know of no good reason for believing in immortality—and, indeed, of no good reason for desiring it. But if Christ was right about God, then the best answers to all our questions are the right ones, and things good beyond all our power to imagine await us in the future. If Christ was right, then we may say quite simply by a deathbed, "Father, in Thy gracious keeping, leave we now our brother sleeping." What more could we want to say?

Christ's explicit sayings have a quite unmatched beauty and clarity. "I am the resurrection and the life . . . whosoever liveth and believeth on

me shall never die." "In my Father's house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you." "Father, into Thy hands I commit my spirit." "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life. . . . My father who hath given them me is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of my Father's hand." That last phrase really says the one essential thing, "No one is able to snatch out of my Father's hand." That is the real ground of a disciple's confidence. I do not wonder to hear from St. Paul the immortal echo of that sentence, "I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God."

The only proof of immortality which really stands the test of life is this one. Jesus had absolute assurance about it. Those, then, who trust Jesus may be sure also.

It is true that in every age men have shown themselves unwilling, and indeed unable, to believe that death can end all for a human personality. There has been a widely diffused sense that because a man is much more than a body, it may be he shall live though his body be cast aside as a garment. The whole personality of Socrates made such an impression on his friends that they could not conceive of him as ceasing to live. "I did not pity him," said Phædo to Echecrates, speaking of Socrates, "for he seemed to me happy both in his bearing and in his words, so fearlessly and nobly did he die. I could not help thinking that the gods would watch over him still on his journey to the other world, and that when he arrived there it would be well with him, if ever



it was well with any man." Yes, indeed, there is a real reason for believing in immortality which consists simply in a perception of the spiritual worth of some personalities. They are so plainly not of this world, that a worldly event like death seems no match for them. I think that in certain moods at least men may attain to certainty about the life to come on such grounds as these. But I have been very near death more than once, and it is the plain fact that for me at such times one ground of confidence and one alone remained. Jesus was sure about this truth, and I am sure that Jesus is to be trusted.

I have read volumes of the communications which spiritualists believe to have come to them from the other world. They seem to me strangely flimsy and uninteresting—strangely unworthy of this great theme. I have also read the amazingly elaborate accounts of the life beyond which Theosophists offer to us on what grounds of evidence I could never discover. And I can only say that after reading them to return to the majestic, simple, and profound words of Jesus seems like returning to health, and sanity, and the open air.

Nor did Jesus leave us only with His words. He did not only SAY that death is no match for love. But in historic fact it was proved to be so. They saw Him die. They saw the earth receive His body. And yet ere long they became aware of His presence with them in unchanged power. If at times we ask for unalterable historic facts on which to base our hopes, the great fact is there in history. It is as well authenticated as any other fact about Him. A triumphant church of men and women raised to power and joy was to all the world the unanswerable proof of it.

I repeat, we want to ask many questions which

Jesus leaves unanswered. We want to know the nature of that other life. We would like to know something of the processes of purification which love must have in store for us if love's desire concerning us is to be fulfilled. We ask the question, "With what body do they come?" And to all these questions He has given us no answer. Books of speculation about them leave me cold. It seems we do not profit much by trying to force or fashion answers for ourselves. One thing, and one thing only, do I know about those who have gone on. They have gone to God. And God's name is love. I am sure, therefore, that He will do with and for them all that love can suggest.

I do not think that an assurance about immortality can be GIVEN to anybody, any more than an appreciation of good music can be given to any one of us. We have to win both. We learn to appreciate music by listening carefully till our ears become sensitive and able to detect the finer qualities of rhythm and harmony. So we can become sure about immortality only by first becoming sure of God, and that we only do by attending to all those experiences in which He is to be known, and by becoming more and more sensitive to the truth about Him. Men have come to me to whom no spiritual values are real, and have asked for some proof of immortality. I know of none that can be given them. The real proof is in Jesus, but it has to be perceived by a genuine appreciation of the complete Jesus. He whose interests are all centred in this world is not likely to be able to appreciate anything which speaks of another world. But, on the other hand, all the elements in life in which there is spiritual value do most plainly seem to me to bear upon them the marks of their immortality. A beautiful

air, a true thought, a genuine love—these elements of experience are so plainly not of space and time, that it becomes at last absurd to suggest that an accident like the dissolution of the body should really affect them. They all become so easily welded into one whole with the life to which Christ leads us. They are, indeed, so plainly elements in the Divine communion that we reach the point of being sure that they are as eternal as God.

There remains one last point which I cannot pass over. The New Testament teaching about immortality suggests on the whole that it is a thing to be won. Eternal life is described as the life of those who are "in Christ." Christ said, "Whosoever liveth and believeth on Me shall never die." It is those whose lives are rooted not in this world but in God over whom death is declared to have no dominion.

And that raises the question, "What of those who die without any conscious knowledge of God? What of all the young and immature who die before their souls seemed to have awakened? What, even, of the foolish, erring souls who have gone very far astray?"

I was once told this singularly moving story. After long and happy years together a husband and wife were separated by death. It was the wife who died. She had been a very practical and lovable soul, but also one of those who seem to be without the religious faculty. She always said that she did not understand, and then went on quietly with her busy and useful life. Her husband, on the other hand, was of those to whom God is very real. It so happened that after some time a minister of religion was talking with that husband

about the life beyond, and insisting that a blessed future was assured to all who have known Christ here. And then to his remarks that husband made this most human reply: "All that may be very true, but heaven could never be heaven to me if Mary were not there."

What that means is that even human love refuses to accept division by death from those to whom it has once become united. It stretches out yearning arms longing to draw those dear ones into the eternal peace and fulness of life. Though the dear ones may most plainly have been sinners it does not desist. Its redemptive desire is quite unquenched by death. What in our best moments we all want is no mere safety for ourselves in the beyond. Our craving is that all with whom we have been bound in fellowship here should attain to that larger and fuller life. We are for all eternity with them most truly mingled. We also would say, "Heaven cannot be heaven for us if they are not there." Yes, that is true even of human love. It is unthinkable that the Divine love should desire less. It is unthinkable that Christ should be satisfied with less. The shepherd who must needs go out to the dark and the mountain because one of his flock was missing is not going to surrender to death any of His own.

I have no definite doctrines to suggest at this point. I know nothing about the redemptive processes through which love will lead those who leave this life still in ignorance of God. I understand very easily why the doctrine of Purgatory was invented. But I also feel we are apt to become foolish when we attempt to fashion definite notions about these hidden things. But I believe that God is love. I believe that love has gracious and all-embracing purposes quite beyond our

understanding. I would feel it an irreverence to suggest for a moment that the best of man's hopes for man can match at all the hopes of God.

In one thing I cannot believe—the defeat of God. Christ has made that impossible.

## CHAPTER VIII

### A DIGRESSION AND A PROBLEM

"THE chaps in my office are an awfully decent lot, and yet, so far as I can find, almost none of them ever think of going to church. They are a straight, jolly crowd who would stand by you at a pinch, and I am bound to say I enjoy their society more than that of the fellows about our church. They don't seem to me to be unbelievers. There is only one of them who ever says a word 'against' religion, but they are not religious in any conscious sense. They are quite decent to the two or three of us who are known to be professing Christians, but I see they really prefer the society of men who make no such profession. Further, they really are jollier, and braver, and more truly sportsmen than the average church member. They have much more charity for sinners, and they disagree far less among themselves than Christians seem to do. They may not profess high ideals, but they make a very pleasant and kindly and robust thing of life."

That is in substance what has been said to me by quite a number of young men in different parts of the country during the last thirty years. And I confess I find a really serious problem raised in this way. The charm of the pagan virtues is indubitable. Our poor approximations to Christian virtue often have no attraction at all. Army officers have often seemed to me far nicer to one another and far more truly courteous to strangers

than ministers, and that though the same army officers will express in conversation views about general affairs which seem to me pagan and disastrous, while the ministers in conversation will hold to the Christian truth in which there is life for mankind.

But why are religious people often such a trial and ordinary non-religious people so easy to get on with? I have instanced army officers, but this question arises in all classes. Why do we all love Bindle, while we shudder at his wife? It really does seem sometimes as if religion tended to dry up the milk of human kindness. I knew a dear old lady once who was meant by nature to overflow in sheer kindness to everybody. But her Christian conscience constrained her to argue with one man about his use of tobacco, and with another because he went to the theatre, and with a third because he did not accept orthodox teaching. And the result was that she was often avoided by her friends, and went without the comfort of a spontaneous expression of her real nature.

Quite seriously it does seem difficult to be religious without being in some ways objectionable. Being religious does certainly mean holding views which involve disapproval of many things that are commonly done. And disapproving of other people is an occupation which rapidly sours and spoils human nature.

Socially it is a far more comfortable thing just to be lax and good-natured. Those jolly and decent chaps in the offices above referred to don't express disapproval of each other's ways, and are only amused when one of their number goes in for a scarlet evening. They don't worry when one of their number gets drunk or another has a lax affair with a woman. And so they get on easily together. But a man who agrees with Jesus Christ MUST

worry over such events. He MUST regard them as serious. And we are all made uncomfortable by the presence of a disapproving spirit in our midst. So the problem arises perhaps unavoidably.

But there remain some things which may well be said about this whole situation.

On the one hand, if one of the "decent chaps" in question were to ask me what he has to gain by becoming definitely and avowedly a Christian disciple, I should want to tell him three things. The first is that no man or woman is going to go through life without God and escape a sense of failure and dissatisfaction. One of the commonest themes of all serious novelists is the partial breakdown of life in the forties. The reason of that is that somewhere about the forties most people exhaust the interest of life's obvious activities. They get past the absorbing charm of athletics and the usual recreations, past the romantic hours of youth, and past the fascination of making good in one's work. And then nothing will avail us except some knowledge of God and some experience of His fellowship. It is the penalty of our greatness that all other things leave us hungry. If communion with God were not available for us all, the cynic would be justified in his embittered verdict about life.

The second thing I would want to say is that we as a society do need a stricter moral code than the easy-going good fellows of the world have as yet adopted. Nothing else can save civilization. The lapses and indulgences about which the average man is so little concerned do as a matter of fact work out to produce misery and heartache for individuals, and for society at large chaos and confusion. With all their attractions, these men and women who take life easily are NOT really facing the challenge of the facts.



And thirdly, I would like to say to all such people that they are very urgently needed for the cause of the Kingdom, that they have great gifts and powers which they are leaving unused, and that just by doing nothing definite and costly to help they are in part responsible for the whole world's present sufferings. If such men have, as they often have, gifts of daring and high spirits, those are just the qualities which are so greatly needed and are so often lacking in the ranks of Christ's followers. I think He must long greatly for what such people could contribute to His cause.

Then there are three other things that the people on the other side would do well to remember. The first is that we may not hope altogether to escape some unpopularity because of our religion. Even Christ was hated by some people in His day. Even if we became like Him some would be offended. There is an offence in honest righteousness for some minds. A true gentleman always excites a certain amount of dislike. His very presence in the world convicts some people of having been rough, selfish, or vulgar in their ways, and they dislike the experience. And the same thing is true in a measure of genuine goodness. There is something wayward in most of us which rebels against the unspoken rebukes of good people. "Confound so and so! If it were not for him I might feel fairly satisfied with myself, but I never meet him without feeling rather a worm." That is an intelligible sentiment to most of us. The exacting type of goodness embodied in Christ is a scourge to many of us. It is really unavoidable that real Christians should be at least for a while unpopular in certain quarters. "Men shall hate you," said Christ Himself.

But having admitted that, the second thing that

falls to be said is that the Christ-virtues demand as their foundation the robust and universal virtues. And in certain Christian circles one feels that the foundation is lacking. Christ had all the robust and universal virtues such as utter honesty with Himself and others, courage, self-control under emotional stress, and so on. I think He assumed in His teaching that His hearers were already familiar with these forms of obligation. They, so to speak, composed the law which He did not want to alter, but to which He had much to add. I am sure that in many cases what makes religious people seem very unlovely is that they have some semblance of the distinctively Christian virtues but have no robust foundation for them. And the result really is nauseous. There are men who can conduct beautiful devotional services, but who are plain cowards in ordinary life. There are others who can be very gentle and kindly but who have never learnt to be honest with themselves or with other people. There are religious enthusiasts who have so little control of themselves that they spread their feelings before the public in a way which Englishmen loathe to see. There are people very punctilious in sacramental practice who yet repeat slander and judge without knowledge. It is in these respects that the "good sportsmen" of the country often beat "the Christian Endeavourers." I sometimes think we fail in our religious education in this respect. It is very important to teach a boy to be gentle, but it is more important still to teach him first of all not to be a coward or a fool. We have many lessons about love in our Sunday Schools, but we probably don't have enough about "playing the game." Men and women are not really going to be of any use to Christ till they have been put through the discipline of learning not to tell lies,

not to evade the consequences of their own deeds, not to be sentimental, not to run away from danger, and not to make a fuss about their feelings. When I find that some of the jolly and decent fellows of the world dislike me, it would be very easy to say that they dislike goodness; but it would be a more wholesome procedure to inquire whether, after all, they do not dislike me for some plain lack of the qualities which belong to ordinary robust manhood.

I believe there are moments in the spiritual careers of the most robust of mankind when the sentiment expressed in the line, "Let me to Thy bosom fly," is spontaneous and overpowering. But we hear too much in many Christian circles about this flying to His bosom, and a great deal too little about going out to speak the truth and take the consequences.

The third thing that many of us need to learn is that in our attitude towards others we would do well to let appreciation come first and criticism only second. And we so often invert that order. If criticism were all that we had to offer to other people we should be entirely useless to them. They are quite right in thinking that they can well do without us if that is all we bring to our fellowship with them. It is very sad from our point of view if A. drinks and B. gambles and C. swears, and D. has an unclean tongue. But it is very splendid from every point of view that all four of them have some very fine qualities and are capable of being sons of God in truth. Till we have seen and rejoiced in the splendid facts it is not time to say anything about the sad ones.

By criticism we seem to be claiming to be superior. By appreciation we create the atmosphere in which people find it easier to be at their best.

I once knew a very keen disciple of Christ who had a remarkable influence in his University even among the wasters and the "bloods." I wondered for a time what was the secret of it; but I wondered no more after one of the rather wild youths of the place had said to me, "That's a wonderful chap. He's the only Christian I ever heard of who will help you home when you are tight and never say a word about it afterwards." The fact was that that particular Christian was very fond of those wild men. He saw and rejoiced in all the good qualities they had, and he knew them well enough to know that their own consciences were lashing them after they had made fools of themselves and that they did not need his reproaches, while they very much did need his faith in them and his friendship.

Having been a slum parson, I am inevitably a very keen temperance reformer, and I confess I think the ways of men with drink very silly and deplorable; but I would rather never speak about Temperance again than lose my faith in ordinary men or separate myself from them by appearing to set up as their judge. I loathe "blue" stories and the whole attitude of mind which produces them and enjoys them, but I would rather endure them in silence than succumb to the temptation to think merely with contempt of the men who make that particular form of folly theirs.

We Christians have been very quick to condemn. But condemning others is an easy achievement. The thing we are really called to do is to make friends of sinners. It is very much harder, but there is always a certain redemptive value in it.

## PART III

### CHAPTER I

#### THE DIVINITY OF CHRIST

THE one essential thing about Christ for me is that He has shown me God. In so doing He has met the deepest need of my being. Because of Him I know in a measure what God is like. Christ tells me that He spoke only such words as God inspired Him to speak, and did only such deeds as the influence of God impelled Him to perform. And so the veil has been lifted, and the heart of God has been shown to men and women.

When I call Christ divine that is exactly what I mean by the words. I have met one who was in character and purpose identical with God. There was no moral difference between Christ and His Father. Alone of the sons of men He constituted "an express image of the Father." And I know not what more I could desire. The needs of my spirit are wholly met. The perfect help towards a life of communion with the Father has been provided. I have seen in Christ all the best—and more than all the best—I ever dreamt that God might be. And that is a saving experience.

And there I am content to leave the matter. That is all the doctrine of the person of Christ into which Christ Himself has led me. I am conscious of no religious compulsion to try to know more about Him. Therefore the theological controversies

about the person of Christ have ceased to seem momentous. I am not spontaneously even interested in them.

But with the Church it has been far otherwise. It has a doctrine about the person of Christ of a metaphysical character to which it attaches very great importance. The result is that a great many people feel that they must become able to accept that doctrine before they can be held to be Christians. It has often been said to me that the divinity of Christ in which I believe is only divinity of character, and that the essential thing is to attribute to Him divinity of "being." And after that it is insisted that we must believe that He was "the only-begotten of the Father," or that He was "of one substance with the Father."

I think it vitally important for the whole cause of Christianity in the world that these assumptions about the necessity of holding a metaphysical doctrine concerning Christ should be openly and frankly challenged. For my part I am sure that I do not know what the above phrases mean. Into the mysteries which they claim to unravel I cannot penetrate, and I do not understand how other men can profess to have done so.

I am aware that the received theology does not really identify Jesus of Nazareth and God the Father, but on the contrary recognizes two centres of consciousness. But in its popular forms the received theology DOES tend to assert that identification. And when that is done the very meaning of the Gospel story is destroyed. Christ spent much time in prayer. And He certainly was not praying to Himself. Tempted like as we are, He taught us that our resource in times of such temptation is to turn to our God. He certainly did not mean that He merely turned in on Himself. He could and did speak constantly

of what He received from the Father. I believe it has been because all these evidences of Christ's dependence on God have been passed over by popular theology that so little real attention has been paid to His spiritual life as a pattern for us.

As soon, however, as the misunderstanding involved in the phrase "Christ was God" has been recognized the question arises as to the sense in which Christ and His Father were one. Now, the only kind of identity between two spirits which I can understand and recognize is identity in purpose and character—identity of will. And that is exactly the relation in which Christ Himself claimed to stand to God. If it be seriously objected to this position that thus we ascribe to Christ "only divinity of character" I have to ask myself what higher categories there are than the moral ones, and in what sense Christ could be more divine than He was by being divine in character. And to that question there is no answer. I really do not know what men mean when they talk about divinity "of being." Does anyone really know?

Very serious issues depend upon this point, none the less. Some time ago I spoke in public of the fact that Christ's way of life was the one true way alike for men and nations—that till we learnt how to make love dominant in all our affairs they were certain to go wrong. Shortly afterwards I received an almost angry letter from a man who wanted to know what significance Christ's life could have for him. "Christ, you say, was a god. I am not a god, but a man with passions. What sense can there be in telling me to live as He did?" So he expressed himself. And in so writing he was exposing the reasons why multitudes of people have never got from Christ what He has been willing to give them. They have thought of Him as "a god," and so have never known the reality

of His humanity or allowed Him to get near to them. He has been to them a mere figure in a theological scheme—the second person in the Trinity. But the real Jesus—the Jesus who both showed men God, and raised our humanity to unheard-of heights—that real person they have never known. And so Christianity has been presented to men shorn of the one great element in it which gives it power over men's hearts.

Those who begin in their dealings with Christianity by facing Christ as the Gospels show Him forth generally find themselves won and held by the whole truth about Him, and thereafter reach a point when there is no possible kind of greatness which they would not claim for Him. But those who begin by accepting a doctrine ABOUT Him, even though that doctrine should ascribe deity to Him, run the risk of never really knowing Him, and therefore never appreciating His true greatness.

Above all else this would seem to me clear, that what matters is whether or no men really love the Lord Jesus Christ with the love that spells itself out in service and sacrifice. That is what makes a man a Christian. It is a quite secondary matter what intellectual account of Christ men are prepared to give, and there is no reason why most of them should be called upon to give any. Lovers are not concerned about definitions.

And here I would repeat what I have already said elsewhere. It has been in my life an enormous relief to get this great complicated theological controversy about the person of Christ put out of the way. When I was in the habit of thinking much about it, it only led me to confusions and perplexities of mind. Release of spirit has come to me since I passed it by. I am neither orthodox nor unorthodox now in relation to it. I merely want to say, "That is not the real point. The real



point is not what my intellect has to say to the creeds of Nicea or Chalcedon, but what my heart and conscience have to say to Jesus of Nazareth." I admit, indeed, that the question when so put is apt to haunt one in a new way. A man may finally decide that he can accept a creed and then feel that he has finished that matter for life. But who can be satisfied with the response of his heart and conscience to Jesus? My answer to the question, "What think ye of Christ?" is that He is one who deserves more at my hands than I have ever given Him. I have not got my answer nicely finished and compact. It is an answer I must needs work out in my life. But surely that is the kind of answer Christ was always asking from men.

## CHAPTER II

### THE LIVING CHRIST—PRAYING TO CHRIST

As my religion all springs from Christ, it might be expected that it would be most natural for me and all like me to refer to any present-day religious experience we may have as having communion with the living Christ.

As a matter of fact the common use of that phrase causes for many of us a certain difficulty which often interferes with our complete sympathy in hours of worship. And therefore I wish to deal with the point shortly.

The question often asked in this connection is something of this sort: "When some Christian people say that they are conscious of the presence of Christ with them, or that they live in fellowship with Christ, do they mean that they are having a different kind of experience from that which others describe as having fellowship with God?" Or put with almost schoolboy bluntness, "Do they conceive that Christ even now carries on separately from God a life of fellowship with men and women?"

Now, of course the answer to that question is No. Christ never carried on any activity in the days of His flesh separate and distinct from God. He was a separate centre of consciousness. He could pray to His Father. He could say, "I and my Father." But the whole wonder of Christ's life lay in this, that He had so completely subordinated Himself to the Father that He spoke only the words which

His Father inspired in Him, and did only the deeds to which His Father moved Him. That is how it comes to pass that in knowing Christ we know the Father. But Christ came to show us the Father—to be a way to the Father—not to put Himself in the Father's place. We have direct access to God.

Surely the truth is that there is one wonderful experience at the heart of all real religion—one, though infinitely varied in form—in which we come to know that God is not far off but in vital relation to us. To have that experience is everything. To be able to describe it in words is a very secondary thing. But when words are used I cannot see that it makes any real difference whether men say that the spirit of God is working in them or whether they leave out the words, "the spirit of" and say simply that God is working in them. And if others, again, instinctively say that Christ is living in them, as St. Paul did, plainly they are not implying that they are having an experience different in kind from the above. They are really saying, "The God whom we know through Christ, and with whom Christ was and is at one, is living in us." And because that is an instinctive way of using words for those to whom all living religion came through Christ, it also explains how people come to pray to Christ.

It may be that from a certain precise and purely intellectual point of view there is something incorrect about such procedure. Christ did not tell His disciples to pray to Him. He even said, "I say not unto you that I will pray the Father for you, for the Father Himself loveth you." To that extent Christ did subordinate Himself to the Father and speak of Himself as distinct from the Father. To that extent it is entirely right to pray always to the Father.

But if the metaphysician must needs try to keep

this point clear, I doubt whether the purely religious mind will ever be able to do so. In our religious moods the distinction implied above vanishes, for there is no spiritual or moral distinction between Jesus and the Father. In prayer we cry to the God whom we only know in His gracious aspects through Christ. It may not be entirely correct to say that Christ is God, but it will always be impossible to prevent certain people from calling God Christ. There is something entirely true and right about it when we do so. Adoration never gets any higher than attributing to God the Creator and Ruler the qualities of spirit which were manifest in the Lord Jesus.

Many people have expressed the wish that all our hymns and prayers might be revised so as to remove the ambiguity which now besets them in this connection. It must be admitted that many hymns do imply something which when analysed is not quite accurate. But the revision would be very hard to make. The religious mind is so sure that Christ is just a living picture of God—that God is just like Christ. Wherefore again I say, Why not call God Christ? In moments of intense emotion, even when the emotion is entirely sincere, it will always prove difficult—perhaps impossible—to observe all the distinctions which the acute analytical mind desires to maintain. Religion that throbs will always seem a little lawless to the philosopher and the scientist. But until it throbs it does not move the world.

## CHAPTER III

### THE TRINITY

I CANNOT say that Jesus has led me to the doctrine of the Trinity. I do not find that He taught it, and I have never been able to understand it. It invites me into a theological or metaphysical world which has certain attractions of its own, but in which I do not find that Jesus guides me. I cannot attain to any religious certainty about the issues which this doctrine raises.

No doubt what really lies in the background in this case is religious experience, and the only claim which the doctrine can have on our attention is that it professes to be an intellectual statement of facts to which experience bears testimony. But when I consider the forms of experience involved here I am not really brought any nearer to the doctrine. What are those forms of experience? There is first the experience of God which comes to us through nature and providence. I need not pause to argue about that here. A great deal of religious experience of a most profound kind is of the same type as that of the Psalmist when he wrote, "When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars which Thou hast ordained." Then, secondly, there is the experience of God which comes to us through Christ, and as that has been the main theme of this book I need say no more about it here. And then, thirdly, there is a further form of experience which Jesus

has taught me to expect, and which consists in inward promptings and restraints which come from God. About these I do wish to say a further word. It would seem to me a very natural and intelligible thing to say that such inward experiences are due to the working of the spirit of God within me. In so speaking I would be using the words "the spirit of God" as a very natural way of speaking about God, just as I might speak of the spirit of my father or of my best friend. But when others go on to speak of "the Spirit" as a person in any sense distinguishable from God, I am wholly bewildered. I do not find that suggestion in the New Testament. It seems to me that St. Paul used the expressions "God" and "The Spirit" as interchangeable expressions. So much so that I was not surprised when a very devout lay friend of mine who had undertaken to read a paper to a theological club on "The Spirit," and for that purpose had read the whole New Testament through afresh, declared that he had discovered that "there is no such person."

God has many ways of working, and one of them is the way of inward inspiration. I wholly and gratefully assent when that truth is described as the most momentous and blessed of truths. Indeed, these direct experiences of God seem to me to be the very crown of life, and the consummation of religion. But so far from finding the doctrine of the Trinity in its classical form a helpful witness to the possibility of such experiences, I rather find that the great and gracious truth about them has only been obscured by that doctrine.

I meet a great many people who admit that they neither understand nor believe the doctrine of the Trinity in its obvious sense, but who none the less retain it and seem to assent to it by interpreting it in a non-natural way. They say they do this

for the sake of the religious or spiritual issues at stake. But it seems to me that what they do is plainly dishonest, and that therefore their procedure cannot conserve any really religious interest. I believe the people in the churches little imagine what an intense feeling of contempt such procedure causes in the minds of many, nor how much that way of treating doctrinal standards has to do with the refusal of men of Christian sympathies to take Orders or even to attend church.

I would like to go a little further into this matter. I have often heard the point dealt with in a way which is supposed to make acceptance of the doctrine easier to our minds. "We find God," say some people, "in Nature and providence, and that is God the Father. We find God in Christ, and that is God the Son. We find God in inward experience as the source of perceptions of beauty and truth, and of inspirations towards right conduct, and that is God the Spirit." But even if that statement were true to experience, the doctrine of the Trinity in its usual form is not even a cumbersome way of expressing it. It explicitly speaks, in the English version of it, of three persons, by which I can only conclude it means three centres of consciousness. And I am told it would not really be a correct translation of the Greek boldly to substitute the word "aspect" for person. Still further, however, I do not find the above statement to be true to experience. I do not find "The Father" in Nature. That is precisely where Nature fails me and Christ rescues me. And so I cannot put into words what Christ has taught me by using the terms of the doctrine of the Trinity at all. What would satisfy me would be some such simple statement as this: "For reasons too many to enumerate I have come to believe in God. Christ has taught me that God is in truth a Father,

and in Christ I have seen the truth about His nature. Further, Christ has led me to expect that that Father will deal with us in direct and gracious ways, and I find that to be true in experience."

Almost against my will I have been led into direct criticism of one of the received doctrines of the Church. But it is not my real purpose to criticize what others believe. What I am concerned to maintain is that an authentic and a life-giving experience of God as revealed in Christ does come to those who cannot receive the doctrine of the Trinity in its usual dogmatic form. People are everywhere hungering for a religion that shall be simple and intelligible. We have kept them hungry by attempting to burden them with a legacy of Greek thought which is useless to the modern mind. Christ is at this time making His own appeal to uncounted people, and yet they are left feeling that there is no place for them in the churches because the metaphysical creeds still have a place of authority there. For them and for myself I long for the day when anybody will feel entirely welcome and at home in the churches, not only as a member, but even as a teacher and an official, who can profess nothing more than a love for Jesus Christ, a belief in God as Christ shows Him forth, and a desire to walk in the ways of discipleship. That latter point—a desire to walk in the ways of discipleship—may indeed be found to constitute a very drastic and possibly a very exclusive test. Christ did ask tremendous things of us in practice. His religion can never be easy to put into acts. But the good news was at first easy to understand, and ought to be so still.



## CHAPTER IV

### MIRACLE

JESUS has never led me to make much of miracle in connection with my religion. He never desired in His lifetime the kind of belief that is based on mere astonishment. He longed to find that His disciples were attaining to perception of the moral and spiritual truths which were embodied in His life and teaching, and the excitement produced in the crowd by his wonderful works was evidently a source of embarrassment to Him. I do not find that it reinforces my own faith to dwell upon those wonderful works. The line of argument which says, We must believe that Jesus was divine and we must believe His teaching and obey His commands BECAUSE He walked on the water or gave sight to the blind—that line of argument does not, in fact, reinforce faith for me. I believe Him because “He spoke with authority,” and His own personality has an ever-increasing authority for me.

None the less the question concerning miracle cannot be avoided, and I want to offer some thoughts about it to my readers.

For a long period the difficulty of believing in miracle seemed to me insuperable, and seemed to constitute a final barrier between me and the religion that was being offered to me. On the one hand I found men of science doing work of extraordinary interest and importance based on the

assumption that the universe is a rational and consistent whole capable of being understood, and that could we but discover them there are laws of Nature which are never broken. I saw for myself that knowledge would become an impossibility if reality were capricious, and that unless Nature behaves in a uniform way the conquest of Nature would for ever be beyond our power. And then, on the other hand, I found religious people who delighted in declaring that God has every now and then suspended the laws of Nature in order to attain special ends, and to declare special truths. Indeed, I think it is true that such people took sincere delight in the contemplation of such breaches of law and were anxious to add to the number of them.

And so for a time it seemed to me that there was an opposition between religion and the whole habit of thought implied by science which could never be ended. Being a Christian involved believing in miracles as breaches of natural law. Pursuing scientific ends involved the assumption that breaches of law do not happen. Face to face with that impasse great numbers of religiously minded men in my early days felt that there was no option for them but to fall back on agnosticism—often very reluctantly.

Now there was indeed no way out of that impasse so long as the question was discussed in abstract terms. If miracles are defined as breaches of the laws of reality then it may be said quite truly that "miracles do not happen." If they did knowledge would be an impossibility. But the whole matter takes on quite a different aspect so soon as we cease to discuss miracles on some abstract definition of them, and turn to discuss particular wonderful events for which the evidence is good, such as Christ's acts of healing. I cannot here digress

into a discussion of the value of the evidence. That is not my province. I believe I am entitled to say that the attempt to discredit the Gospels as good history has failed. Though the Gospels are not verbally inerrant, though there remain discrepancies between them on details, and though possibly some extraneous matter has crept into them, we have as good evidence for the healing activity of Jesus as for the murder of Julius Cæsar. Let us take, then, an incident such as the healing of the impotent man. If anyone were to be so bold as to say, "That cannot have happened, because such an event would constitute a breach of the laws of reality," the retort would at once spring to one's mind, "But do you know the laws of reality?" And I know of no first-class scientist who would reply "Yes." That is the great new fact in the present situation. Those who know most about Nature are most explicit in confessing that they know very little. Even in my lifetime so many wonders have been discovered, and so many marvels accomplished, that we have all had to accept as established facts things which fifty years ago would have been regarded as impossibilities. We begin to realize that reality is a great book in which we have read only a few pages. We have no such clear knowledge of reality as a whole and in detail as would justify the statement "such and such an event CANNOT have happened." Even the old phrase "certain as gravity" has lost much of its force. The physicists seem to me to be the humble-minded people of to-day, and to occupy a totally different attitude from that of the scientific dogmatism of 1890.

True scientific inductions can only be reached by a review of all the facts, and if it transpires that certain events which had seemed very unlikely did none the less happen, the only true course is to

begin again seeking for a view of reality which will include *all* the facts. Whatever has happened, we have to say that reality must be such that that event could happen. If Jesus is a fact, then the plan of the universe included Jesus from all time.<sup>1</sup>

The mere logical difficulty about many of the miracles has therefore disappeared for me. By refusing to define them as breaches of the laws of Nature a possible place at least is found for them in reality. They do not bulk in my religion. The centre of interest lies for me elsewhere. But at least the difficulty which they used to constitute is out of the way. I realize that we owe it to truth to ask for very reliable evidence before believing anything; and I would not claim to have been convinced by the available evidence even for all the miracles of the New Testament. But it does not distress me though I find myself, with many others, less and less able to believe some of the incidents recorded there. The doctrine of an infallible book has no place in my religion.

On the other hand, however, the more I realize Jesus the more do I find myself expecting that He should have done such things as no other can do. Unique causes always lead to the expectation of unique results. I could believe almost anything about the results of such power as was incarnate

<sup>1</sup> The real importance of this point seems to me to lie in this—that on the old view the religious mind was the credulous mind, and that often meant not the childlike but the childish and magic-loving mind. Whereas surely the scientific mind with its sincere passion for truth is really the religious mind. If God made the world it must surely be an essentially religious occupation to try to understand and appreciate His handiwork. Since scientists have discovered the immensities of time, and space, and such wonders as wireless, and X-rays, and electrons, they have only added to the essentially religious awe with which I repeat the old devotional words, “O Lord, how wonderful are Thy works! in wisdom hast Thou made them all!”

in Jesus. I see that buoyant faith and love do very wonderful things every now and then in the world about me. None of the wonderful things Jesus of Nazareth is said to have done seem to me even very strange in connection with such a personality.

In particular it seems to me that we have been strangely slow to believe certain things which His life seems to demonstrate about the power of spirit over the body. God acting through Jesus plainly wrought cures of disease. In general Jesus, who was filled with God, would seem to have occupied an attitude of mastery towards the body to which many of us are almost entirely strangers. But I think it was part of the expectation of Jesus that His disciples, having learnt from Him how to live in constant touch with God, would also attain to that attitude of mastery. The fact that we have not yet done so indicates one of the many directions in which we still have very great things to learn from Him.

## CHAPTER V

### UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

THERE are various questions or issues generally connected with Christianity which I find I never remember unless I happen to read the religious Press or hear the talk of special sections of the religious world. The suggestions that Old Testament prophecy was a foretelling of the future; that Jesus was born of a Virgin; that His physical body was reanimated after His death; that He "ascended into Heaven"; that He "descended into Hell," with many more.

None of these matters have any real relation that I have been able to discover to my religion. Christ has not said anything about any of them to me. If I believed in the doctrine of the infallible book, I should have to face them. But I do not believe in that doctrine. Therefore they pass me by. Left to myself I never remember them. When I am preparing for the pulpit they never suggest themselves. And I have only one thing to say about them here, which is that the suggestion may well be resented that Christ's followers ought to have any particular view concerning them. Whatever be the truth about them, they are *not* of primary importance. About some of them I have opinions. About others, such as the idea that "He descended into Hell," I have not even an opinion, because I do not know what the words mean. About others, again, such as the Virgin

birth, it seems to me impossible that anyone should have an assured conviction, because the evidence on which an assured conviction might be based can never now be forthcoming.

But about them all I am sure that they have no relation to "experimental religion," which is the only kind of religion that matters. They simply "do not come in."

I can conceive that for many a day many minds will continue to be interested in them. But I pray that the days may soon be past when any party in any Church will claim that their particular views on them are of any particular moment. And of course it seems to me in the highest degree improper that they should have any place in any creed which is intended for liturgical use.

And now for a greater matter. I want to face the fact that there are great and even pressing questions about which the Christian disciple will probably find himself perplexed, and to which his religion will give him no clear and sufficient answer. To mention only a few—the origin of evil; the element of cruelty in nature; the mystery of suffering; the enigma of free will; the inscrutable nature of what men call Providence.

Now, there are many people who seem to feel that they cannot conscientiously accept any religion until it has given them a clear and satisfying answer to all these questions. They imply that a religion ought to give them a fully articulated philosophy of all things in heaven and earth, and they look to Christianity and its exponents expecting such a philosophy.

The point that arises here needs to be handled with care. Were I to say bluntly that Christianity has not got an answer to all these questions and is not concerned about them, I might seem to be

implying that Christianity is suspicious of intellectual activities and seeks to win men merely through their emotions. And that is not the case.

Christ called upon men to love God "with the mind." As a matter of experience His influence has an awakening effect upon all human faculties. They are quickened into fuller life—and the mind among them. For my part I feel that a reverent attitude towards all the great intellectual activities of the race is demanded of me. It is inconceivable that God should have endowed us with powers of reasoning and of abstract thought, and then have called upon us to suspend the activity of those powers. It is a Christian interest that thinking—exact and rigid—should go on.

But it seems to me no less clear that Christianity cannot claim to have an answer ready for us to all the great questions. With some of them Christ never dealt in any explicit way. His message is fundamentally a secret about the way to live. He opens access to the springs of life. He makes experience of God possible. He brings men and women into touch with the source of power, but He leaves many things unexplained.

Christianity offers us no science in the strict sense of that word, and no articulated philosophy. It has the essential thing to say to the man who is facing life. But he who will not put the truths of Christianity to the test of life until all his questions have been answered will wait beyond this life. No religion answers all our questions. And yet religion goes on proving its truth in life. The man in the Gospel who met his critics and opponents with the remark, "One thing I know, that whereas I was blind now I see," was occupying the one unassailable position. All Christians can say, "One thing we know." They may even feel sure that they know many things. But they may not



profess to have worked out the relation of their elements of knowledge to all things in earth and heaven. That is another matter. It is our plain destiny to live through our days without complete satisfaction to our inquisitive minds. But in the strength of what we do know we may, if we will, live with power and die with courage.

If this attitude of trusting to partial knowledge seems to some to need defence, it may well be pointed out that we all act in a precisely similar way in real life. We do not quite understand what matter is, but we assume its reality and rely on the constancy of its behaviour every day. No one has solved the mystery of the freedom of the will, but we put forth our wills on the assumption of their freedom daily. We have not finally answered the philosophical question about the objective reality of the things presented to our senses, but the most stubborn of agnostics assumes their reality for working purposes every meal time. In short, we live upon the basis of our knowledge though we are encompassed by vast realms of ignorance. The religious man merely has his special contribution to make to the sum of knowledge that is gained through experience. He has come to know something of God, and he finds that his knowledge holds good through manifold experiences of life. His claim is to have something to add to that island of knowledge to which we cling amidst the vast seas of the unknown.

When this is realized then Christianity is rightly conceived, but not until then. In saying this I am admitting that Christianity does not give me all I want. I suspect that all Christian disciples wish at times that Christ had said more about some of the matters that puzzle them. We remain girt about with mysteries. At times, moreover, the unanswered questions will insist upon obtruding

themselves. Across hours of devotional joy in God there fall shadows, not so much of doubt as of troubled perplexity.

Holding to our Christian faith may at times call for a very great endeavour. For St. Paul it evidently meant a daily fight. Someone once said that being a Christian means betting your life that Christ was right, staking your all on Him in a confusing world. I wholly agree. In certain hours, when the vision of Him is clear, faith seems inevitable and gloriously certain. At other times, when the world has been shouting its characteristic words in our ears, we may have to hold to our faith with a tenacity which will at times seem desperate.

And yet the alternative to accepting the truth that is in Christ becomes more and more difficult the more clearly it is faced. Let us for a moment assume that He was wrong, and that there is no loving God whose name is Father. Let us assume that all the people have been wrong who have believed that they held communion with Him, and that the whole proposal of the Kingdom is inconsistent with the nature of reality. And with what are we confronted?

It would then be the case that the most beautiful thing in history—namely, the life of Christ—was founded upon a delusion; that the person who most of all draws out the best in us was a mistaken dreamer, and therefore a mischievous misleader of men; that the effective practical lives lived by thousands of His followers were inspired by something unreal; that the world has been shaken and transformed, and shaken again by a superstitious fancy.

No! I cannot in my most sceptical hours rise to that. If that were true the world would be a mere madhouse. If that were true, then an end for ever to the possibility of testing truth in life. If

that were true, then falsehood can be more powerful than truth. And from that absolute and ultimate scepticism mere sanity may well warn us off. We may well say it is a strange world, though wonderful; perplexing, though in many ways glorious. But amidst its strange and perplexing appearances the thing that a sane man in his best moods may be most certain about is that Christ is to be trusted. A light shines about Him, and the best of all our instincts tells us that there, if anywhere, we may find the truth.





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